The Path to Happiness
Dialogues about happiness
K. Abu Ftoh

إنجليزي

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SPACE CHANNELS

Al-Fotouh information center
First edition: 1435 - 2014

Publications:
Fadaa Channels

Al Fotouh Center for Information

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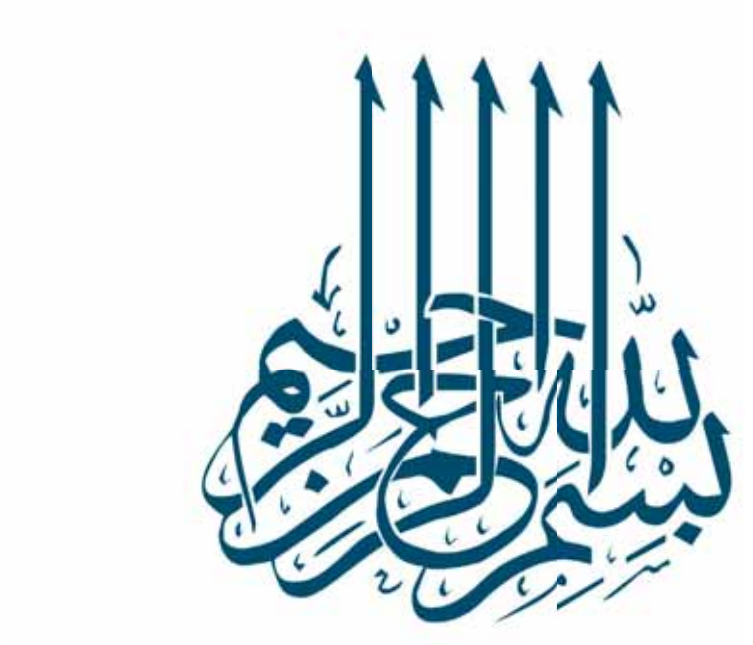
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Introduction

There is no doubt that the world, in this day and age, is bursting at the seams with reactions of diverse thoughts and directions that indicate modern man's eagerness to answer the big questions in life, to assist him to come out of the wilderness and that condition of bewilderment he is experiencing, as he is eager to find someone to guide him to the straight path. Moreover, the globe is witnessing an unprecedented boom in the world of communication and information and the speed of its transmittance is a matter which affects humans and their insight and even their happiness and peace of mind. From this point of view, we have a sacred duty towards our religion and a human duty towards mankind, which is to convey the righteous words of Allah to the confused. However, in order to proceed with this, we have to do it in a language understood by those to whom we are preaching the message, that is with logic, not only with the words they understand, as this is how the messengers of Allah conveyed the message to their people.

The Qur'an urges us to debate and argue with truth and reason and emphasizes that argument in the situation of calling to the path of Allah, should be in the best possible manner and it does that particularly in relation with the people of the book. The Qur'an mentions to us many an example in its dialogues and arguments, and not only that, it also mentions the arguments which objected against the Qur'an and its message, without falsification or hesitance. Furthermore it follows these objections with convincing substantive replies and that is only because Islam is not just a call to belief, but also a call for reformatory change which cannot be achieved except through change of ideas and reformation of minds. This in turn cannot be obtained except through persuasion, which is done mainly through debate and dialogue.

I cannot fail to stress that these dialogues may not alone be enough to provide the full concept of Islam, or to deal with all the doubts raised by its enemies, however I do think that it may

be enough to break the barriers that might come between the seeker of truth and his recognition of the road to happiness in this world and the Hereafter, the road of civilization and freedom, through the true slavery to Allah alone with no partner - of course if the other obstacles are far removed.

It is also worth noting here, that I have referred when working on these dialogues, to many sources and references, and hundreds of pages on the internet from which I have quoted some passages as they are and changed some in others, however, I have not indicated this in the footnotes, as I believe that it is not necessary in this nature of dialogue , as footnotes may cause confusion to the reader and stop the flow of ideas. Instead I have mentioned most of these references and sources at the end of the book for those who wish to further their reading, but unfortunately I was not able to mention the exact web pages to which I referred to when gathering my information.

Finally... the fictional characters in this dialogue are three: two main central characters with whom I started and ended the dialogues and the third whom is met somewhere in the middle. Rashid is a Muslim writer-cum-journalist, who is living temporarily in Britain, and Michael is an English citizen who is a teacher. They became acquainted with each other through one of the blogs on the internet and then they agreed to meet in a cafe in London for the resumption of their dialogues face-to-face. They were then later joined during their visit to Paris by Rajiv, an Indian engineering student who was studying in Germany...

Now I leave you with the first dialogue, with Rashid and Michael; hoping that you will find in all the dialogues, a new addition.

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The Cup that Makes one Negligent

The Cup that Makes one Negligent

As previously scheduled, Yousef met his friend Michael at the café. Soon after they sat down.

Michael started talking to Yousef, saying:

Michael: "Tonight, I'm going to bring up a subject, and I think you will agree with my point of view."

Yousef: "Come on my friend! Let's first have a drink."

Michael: "Sorry for being in a rush, you're right."

Michael called the waiter, who went to them and took Yousef's order.

Yossuf: "Tea…"

The waiter (in surprise): "Tea?!"

Yossuf: " … with lemon."

The waiter (in even more of a surprise): With lemon?!

Michael (laughing): "Yes, he's a Muslim and doesn't drink alcohol. I'll have tea with lemon as well, to apologize for being in a rush and to show my agreement with my friend."

The waiter went to fetch their orders.

Yousef (muttering): "How strange that was?"

Michael: "Oh my friend, in our country drinking wine is like drinking water. There are different kinds of alcoholic drinks with various flavors and different styles of drinking. That's why the waiter was surprised that you ordered tea instead of alcohol. This is not very common here amongst adults, I'm sorry to say .. really sorry.. "

Yousef (dazed): "But this is weird !"

Michael: "Why? What's so weird about it? It's not a new thing for us, and this is not in our country only, but in the entire West."

Yousef: "That's exactly it."

Michael: "How?!"

Yousef: "Because most of you are Christians and you are supposed to believe in the Bible, and the Torah stated that drinking wine causes a great deal of harm. It stated: 'Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh.'(Proverbs 23:20), and it forbad being drunk: 'Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them!'" (Isaiah 5:11)

And in the Bible, it is mentioned in Leviticus (10:9): “And the Lord spoke to Aaron: Do not drink wine nor strong drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest you die; it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations.”

In Judges (13:14): “The angel of the Lord said to Manoah, ‘… She may not eat of anything that comes from the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink….’ And there are many other texts that dispraise winebibbers, and forbid associating with them, and also dispraise those who even look at wine.”

Michael: “Wait a moment, Yousef! Don’t think that you are the only person who knows about the holy books. Many of our clerks allow drinking wine, and some of them quoted from the Old Testament that some prophets got drunk. Besides, I have heard from other clerks that actually what is forbidden is only intoxication. In the Bible, Jesus Christ drank wine. In Luke (7:33): ‘For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and you say, ‘He has a devil’; 34 The Son of Man is come eating and drinking (wine); and you say, ‘Behold a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of publicans and sinners!’’35 But wisdom is justified of all her children.”

Yousef: “What you have mentioned takes us to two serious problems which affect the western man and the western communities, as well.

First, I’m sorry to say that your Holy Bible has been proved to have many texts that have been interpolated; and that the devil’s advocates twisted them, which resulted in contradictions in many doctrines; like prohibiting and allowing wine, claiming that Christ drank wine, but at the same time considering him too exalted for that. It is also mentioned in Luke (1:15) describing Jesus Christ, reported from Gabriel, peace be upon him: ‘For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink….’ The contradiction is obvious.”

Second, Your clerks monopolize the Bible, and others claim that they speak in the name of God, and many of them consider that they have the authority to prohibit and permit, and you follow their rules.”

Michael: “You do have a point there, and I admit that many of us don’t really fully believe in the Bible and don’t trust all of the clerks. Our society has been greatly changed since the Renaissance. Therefore, in real trials, we rely on only intellect and abstract science. Forget about holy books and religion, and let’s talk reasonably and scientifically. “

Yousef: "First, allow me to say that this is your problem with religion, due to what you have suffered from the tyranny of the church and its fight against science, especially in the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, you consider every religion like that, assuming that it conflicts with science, and it is supposed to only exist in places of worship. On the contrary, in Islam we don't suffer from this ailment at all; rather our religion encourages science, without any holy secrets being monopolized by clerks.

Anyway, let's talk in the language that convinces you, though this won't oppose what I believe in. And I'll prove that for you."

Michael: "Go ahead."

Yousef: "You said that what you believe in now is intellect and science. Let's start with asking you: If intellect is of that much an importance to you, then does wine preserve intellect or make it dull?"

Michael: "This is a trap, not a question."

Yousef: Allah honored man and privileged him over many other creatures. Allah bestowed the grace of intellect upon man. In Islam, Allah ordained that the insane person is not Mukallaf [1], even if his body is healthy. Allah commanded us to preserve this great grace and not to damage it by any means. And what's more, preserving this grace is one of the five essential universal principles in Islam. This is why Islam prohibits drinking wine or taking drugs, or any other similar materials that befog the mind."

Michael: "What are these five essential universal principles that you have just mentioned?"

Yousef: "Discussing this point will side track us. Anyway, they are, in general, religion, soul, intellect, one's honor and money."

Michael: "Fine. Go on."

Yousef: "It is scientifically known that alcohol, which is the intoxicating substance in wine, is quickly absorbed in the stomach and small intestines, and quickly reaches the blood, and then it easily penetrates all the tissues of the body; like the central nervous system.

Even in very small amounts (about 0.03%), alcohol affects the functions of neurons and slows down the transfer of the neuro-currents between them; which results in a reduction in concentration, imbalance, and mental derangement. It is strictly forbidden in the Holy Qur'an, which says: 'O you who believe! Intoxicants (all kinds of alcoholic drinks),

(1) Mukallaf means one who is legally competent; one who is competent enough to be responsible for his religious duties.

gambling, Al-Ansâb (altar stones), and Al-Azlâm (arrows for seeking luck or decision) are an abomination of Shaitân's (Satan) handiwork. So avoid (strictly all) that (abomination) in order that you may be successful)' [Al-Mâ'idah:90]"

Michael: "But we see some benefits in wine, such as refreshment and warmness, especially in our cold country."

Yousef: The Holy Qur'an doesn't deny that it has some benefits. Allah, glory be to Him, said: 'They ask you (O Muhammad, prayers and peace be upon you) concerning alcoholic drink and gambling. Say: "In them is a great sin, and (some) benefit for men, but the sin of them is greater than their benefit.' [Al-Baqarah: 219] When comparing these benefits with the harms it brings, the Qur'an prohibited it, as their harm is greater. Let's talk scientifically, which you believe in.

Besides the behavioral impacts, psychological and social harms, and unconscious behaviors that lead to committing crimes, financial loss and the well known acts of harming others, science has proved that drinking intoxicants, especially when a state of drunkenness is reached, results in the following health damages:

Wine (intoxicants) affects the glands of the body in general, causing disorder, for both the glands and the heart.

It causes congestion in the reproductive organs.

It also causes gastric and duodenal ulcers and inflammations in the digestive system,

which directly causes severe infections of the mouth, pharynx, stomach, intestines, nerves, endocrine glands and senses.

It also causes hepatitis and hepatorrhexis, which leads to hepatic fibrosis, and then the incurable hepatic cirrhosis which finally results in liver cancer.

The damages to the respiratory system are uncountable.

As for getting warm by means of drinking wine, according to your words, this is a result of the effect of wine-saturated blood on the skin, which causes vasodilatation (expansion in the blood vessels "arterial capillaries" at the end of the capillaries of the veins and arteries). So the surface of the skin becomes full of warm blood from all the parts of the body, carrying with it heat and warmth. This causes a false warmth to the alcoholic. Therefore the alcoholic's skin is blushed and glows, and he doesn't feel the cold anymore. The warm flow of blood continues from

all over the parts of the body, which causes interior heat and warmth loss that are necessary for physiological operations needed for life.

There are so many ways to feel warm, other than drinking intoxicants. It is well known that Muslims who live in cold areas don't drink intoxicants seeking warmth."

Michael: "But notice, Mr. Yousef, that your talk applies the assumption that one reaches the state of drunkenness, thus I believe that drinking a little amount of wine is still okay."

Yousef: "The problem is that when you start drinking, it influences your mood, then the body starts asking for more, which makes the wine drinker ask for more. The more the ratio of alcohol increases, the more the body needs more, and so on.

Let me tell you about the abstract of a New Zealand medical study which indicated that the harms resulted from drinking intoxicants, even in small or moderate amounts, exceed any prospected benefits, which opposes the common conception widely spread in the West, that one cup of intoxicant a day prevents heart diseases. In his published article in the Lancet, a general medical journal, Dr. Rod Jackson, a professor of epidemiology at Auckland University, New Zealand, concluded that there is no overall benefit for light to moderate drinking. They stated that any coronary protection that exists in light-to-moderate drinking is very small compared to the harms related to such consumption, which outweigh any benefits.

Here lies the scientific and Islamic legislative miracle in the Prophetic Hadith(1): 'Every intoxicating drink is Haram (i.e. forbidden), whatever intoxicates in a large amount, a small amount of it is Haram.'"

Michael (Sarcastically): "Wow! That sure was a hot discussion, not just warm. I think I need a cold cup of lemon in conclusion to our meeting."

Yousef (laughing): "Lemon without tea?! But you didn't even mention the topic that I was supposed to agree with you on."

Michael: "Let's have it in the next meeting then."

Yousef: "In sha'a Allah Ta'ala (If God wills)."

(1) The term hadith refers to reports of statements or actions of Muhammad (peace be upon him), or of his tacit approval or criticism of something said or done in his presence.

One wife … Is it Enough?

One wife … Is it Enough?

Yousef arrived on time, finding Michael waiting for him at their table. Surprisingly, he found that he had already ordered his drink to welcome him. Yousef greeted him and then sat down.

Michael: "I have ordered your favourite drink; tea with lemon. I guessed that's what you always drink - your favourite."

Yousef: "I accept your drink to welcome me. Though I really do prefer this drink, I do enjoy a variety of drinks and also a change, even to less preferred choices. I think this is human nature in general."

Michael: "I may agree with you. But let's put this aside and start our topic. However, excuse me for interrupting, but… shall I order you another drink?"

Yousef: "No… No, thanks. You look as though you are all set for a discussion!"

Michael: "No, not to that extent. It's just that I don't want to waste any more time in discussing another unscheduled topic, as was the case last time."

Yousef: "Well, go ahead then."

Michael: "As I told you in the last meeting, I think that the subject I'd like to discuss with you is one about which I believe you will agree with me, though I know that the belief that opposes this point of view is widely spread in your communities."

Yousef: "Great. I don't like disagreement, and my discussions with you are just to reach common grounds, or, at least, correct the understanding of both our points of view. So, what is the topic?"

Michael: "Being brief and concise, the topic is that I believe that marriage should be monogamous for both sides. In other words, I believe that the polygamy, that Islam allows, is a kind of oppression meted out towards the woman, don't you agree with me?!"

Yousef: "Which woman do you mean?"

Michael (in surprise): "The woman! The wife! Is there any other woman in this relationship?!"

Yousef: "As we previously agreed, to rightly discuss a topic it should be within a general framework in which all matters are arranged and all dimensions are considered."

Michael: "Well, How can this affect our topic?"

Yousef: "It can affect it as when we discuss this topic, we should consider the woman's interests, as the female sex; i.e. all women, and consider the society's interests as a whole, and man's interests, as well, and the differences between him and the woman."

Michael (interrupting): "Here we come to the origin of the oppression that is meted out towards the woman in your community: the differences between the man and the woman! These so called differences are values set by the males in your eastern community, in order to exploit women and use her for your own enjoyment. What are these differences (that you referred to)? Why doesn't the woman have the right to marry more than one man? Isn't that evidence of the men's lust in this community?

Yousef: Wait... Wait… slow down, my friend.. You have thrown a fission bomb of questions at me which is prohibited in any conversation, and all of which I can't deal with at one time.. All of these will be discussed, but let's first break this bomb into pieces. Starting with what provokes you most: Don't you agree with me that there are differences between men and women?

Michael: What differences?

Yousef: For a start; the biological differences between the physical nature of women and men.

Michael: Of course there are biological differences, what does this have to do with our topic?

Yousef: I won't speak from a religious prospective, though I definitely believe in the necessity of accepting and admitting it (such a view), but I will speak from an intellectual and scientific prospective, which you have previously declared that you believe in. Look sir,

I recently conducted scientific studies that prove that the chemistry behind love in man differs from that in woman. This urged many scientific institutions to intensively research the emotional differences between men and women. Researchers discovered astonishing results which denotes that the male genes induce polygamous relationships, whereas the female genes induce stability and monogamous relationships. Modern-day science has already proved that man can love more than one woman, without affecting his love for any of them.

A CNN site cited on the authority of Lisa Diamond, a Professor of Psychology at the University of Utah, that there is biological evidence that plurality in sexual male relationships originates from the male physical structure.

A team of researchers from the British Oxford University denoted in a study in 2007 that women, on the contrary to men, are mainly interested in their bodies or their children, because of their abundance of the hormone oxytocin, which increases their attachment to their children.

New studies indicate that particular parts of men's brains grow to twice the size of that of women's. Perhaps the greatest difference between the male and female brain is that men have a part which is responsible for sexual desire which is almost 2.5 times larger than that in women. Furthermore,

do you think, my friend, that these differences should not have an influence on reality?

Michael: If this information is true, then it will naturally have an effect.

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The Bleeding Flower

The Bleeding Flower

Once Yousef was seated at the table, he took his laptop out of his bag and while he was busy starting it up, he addressed Michael:

Tonight I'll show you a rare video clip. The clip barely exceeds half a minute, but it is unusual, because it will take us through history to about a century ago; it is a visual document.(1)

With great interest, the heads of Michael and Yousef turned towards the laptop and they looked directly at its screen.

Michael: (After watching the video) Oooh, that's great! I'm so intrigued to see what the pattern of life was like in my country, Britain, nearly a hundred years ago! Look at the joy on the faces of the passers-by in the street! Look at the delight of this child! Life was less constrained and more natural. Such a life is really appealing to the self!

Yousef: I'll replay the clip to draw your attention to another important observation.

(Yousef hits the re-play button, and continued his conversation with Michael.)

Yousef: Look! That woman…There, two…No five, actually six women, notice that for all of them the only parts of their bodies exposed are their heads - though they are covered with hats - and the hands, and all of them are wearing loose-fitting clothing that does not reveal the shape of their bodies.

Michael: True!

Yousef: So what happened?!

Michael: What happened where?

Yousef: In your societies.. .

Michael: You mean nudity and lack of modesty?!

Yousef: Exactly! But I'm also pointing out that this shows the collapse of an entire system of moral values, in general.

(1) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rb6R7Mmhjq8

Michael: Personal freedom. We are now societies that hold freedoms as being sacred and each person has the right to choose the lifestyle that he desires.

Yousef: Of course, I understand that, and this is a topic that we should look into thoroughly later in a discussion session or even several sessions perhaps, but what is striking here is that there is a full concordance within your society in relation to this shift in moral values, as if all the members of the society draw from the same single reference in their choices.

Michael: I am sure it is no secret to you that there is, what we call, the «culture of the society» according to which an individual is brought up. This culture turns into natural practices that an individual does without recalling the reference and without the society finding such practices strange or denying them, and within this culture there may be qualitative differences between the choices of individuals.

Yousef: Excellent!! Now if we take this phenomenon and search for what is right and what is wrong in it, we shall find that your Bible calls for modesty and lack of adornment. It says in 1 Timothy (2:9 – 2:10): (In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with modesty and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; (10) But (which becomes women professing godliness) with good works..)

Michael: My dear Sir, this is fit only for those women who belong to the church, but in our lives outside the church, as I've already told you previously, we have distanced religion from interfering with our lives since the Age of Enlightenment.

Yousef: But my friend, this clip that we have just watched, where women are decently covered in the street, and not in the church, was several centuries after what you call the "Age of Enlightenment". If I agree with you in that religion has been left out of the components of your reference of values, I still need to ask: What happened? What happened to your women that made them turn to such indecency and nudity?

Michael: Indecency from your point of view, but I see it as something normal, and let me point out that it was winter time, or at least cold weather, in the video clip, and this is evident in the nature of the clothing

worn by the men, and children too – as well as the dark colors. This modesty may be due to the cold weather. But that does not negate a fact that we all know, which is that women of that age and those of more recent times were dressed more decently than they are now. As to what happened, it simply may be that values and concepts may have changed according to the evolution of society.

Yousef: This is another issue which we can discuss in another separate session, which is that of relative morality, for though I understand that there is development in science and in tools used and other means, I see that morals and values should not be subjected to such a development.

Michael: No harm in discussing that later, but allow me to ask, Mr. Yousef, why do you always view women as a mere body? Why are you so preoccupied with that?

Yousef: Islam views women and men as human beings. A human being is a wondrous creature, which is created of a body, a soul and a mind. We cannot ignore any of these components, including not only the physical body but also its lower animal instincts. This talking animal can never develop up to the level of being a true human being except through a system in which moral discipline and spiritual sublimity complement the social and legal structure. When you mentioned enlightenment and separated the church, or rather religion, from life, you were satisfied with the church being connected with only spiritualities, and so let the mind break out of the framework of religion and you did what you liked with your bodies. That is the reason why the demons of material civilization gave free rein to the enjoyment of the carnal animal instincts outside the moral and religious framework, and in order to satisfy their animalistic gluttony, they encouraged women to show their charms in various ways and in all situations, and implanted this idea in the societies in the name of rights and freedoms.

Michael: But we see women in that state of nudity day and night, and we are not moved by these desires you dub as “carnal animal instincts”.

Yousef: Do you think that this is a virtue or a noble manner? The consequence that may take place sooner or later from getting used to viewing this nudity or sexually exciting scenes is sexual frigidity. This is followed by an even more harmful damage, which is searching for stimuli

other than what man has become accustomed to, which eventually may lead him to homosexuality.

Michael: You have different types of consequences, Mr. Yousef, those that take place in the short term and those that take place later?

Yousef: Yes, there are consequences of this phenomenon in the area of crimes, for he who does not reach such sexual frigidity because of bodily, social or educational circumstances, suffers from sexual frenzy, of which one result is the prevalence of rape, which statistics of rape cases highlight. Let me just mention here a few examples:

A A survey of the French Interior Ministry indicates the occurrence of 4412 rape cases in just one year in France, an average of almost one incident every two hours.

In Britain: London's Metropolitan Police organized an intensive awareness campaign to encourage women to learn martial arts, and take a positive attitude, rather than surrender, when subjected to attacks by men. This occurred following the announcement of the rise of the number of violent crimes and rape in the streets of London by 11% in one year.

In the U.S.: The National Center for Victims of Crime, a resource and advocacy organization for crime victims, announced that the rate of rape in the United States reached (1.3) adult woman per minute. The center added that one out of every eight adult women in the U.S. had been raped. This was in 1991.

As for 2009, statistics indicate that one out of every three 14-year-old girls is subject to rape, and there are half a million rape cases in the U.S. per year, and that 61% of American girls have lost their virginity before the age of 12.

There is another type of crime, called the unmentioned crime, which is the harassment by employers, managers or teachers directed towards women, who are under the influence of men of authority. Usually such crimes are not recorded, because of the woman's fear that she might lose her job, or because she wants some compensation, or has difficulty in proving her case.

Of course, these figures do not represent the entire truth, for the (Anti-rape Association) estimates that for every case that speaks out about what happened to her, there are 35 that are silent.

Michael: But a problem like that of rape is a complex one, intertwining with many factors: psychological, educational, social and even economic.

Yousef: That's right, but we cannot also deny that one of the biggest factors is the excitement in nudity, even if it entails only looking. A U.S. study notes that crimes of rape decrease during the winter. This may be caused by the low rate of nudity in women's clothing, or because people do not go out much, creating less opportunities to meet, and both reasons confirm the same point.

Michael: But, ultimately, women are those who desire such a form of dress, by their own will. This is personal freedom, as I've previously told you. We cannot prevent them from that.

Yousef: That's what it looks like from the outside, but the fact is that the leaders of Western societies, led by men, are the ones who promote the culture of nudity, beautify it in the eyes of the society, and set up a supportive environment for it. They create the means that facilitate its spread, so that they can enjoy women with no restrictions. In fact, they have passed laws that are unjust for woman's chastity, modesty and weaknesses; for man-made laws in the west show pity towards the rapist more than they do towards the raped, which in fact helps spread rape. Furthermore, in some western countries rape is considered a moral violation, not a crime of violence.

Consider this practical example: In Finland, one of the countries that is advanced in giving considerable care to women, a man forced a woman to have sex with him in a toilet for the disabled in a car park. He hit her head against the wall, and twisted her arm behind her back. According to the opinion of the prosecution, this was not rape because "little" violence was used!! The man was only convicted of forcing the victim to have sexual intercourse with him and was sentenced to a suspended period of seven months in prison!!

My friend, which society out of the two is more secure morally, today's society, or the society of a century ago?! Would you like to enjoy watching the video clip again?!

Michael: You made your point, Mr. Yousef. But from the Islamic point of view: What is your view about that issue?

Yousef: This matter needs another session, or several, to discuss.

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Modest Dress

Modest Dress

Yousef and Michael met at the train station as they had arranged, at the platform of the train travelling to Paris via the English Channel tunnel… They looked for a suitable seat to sit on and wait until departure.

Michael: I think that we have plenty of time to chat about your view of the issue of women's dress... You wanted to talk to me about hijab. Didn't you?

Yousef: Many people think that hijab is merely a scarf that covers the head, or a headdress. But those people don't understand that hijab is actually a concept and an entire social system. Therefore, we should consider the matter in this context.

Michael: Well, I think that you are complicating the matter, my friend, and giving it more than it is worth.

Yousef: No, not at all. We see people differ with regards to how they lay down the limits of covering their bodies. Each group thinks that their limits represent progress and civilization, and while one group considers the others as being backward and puritanical, the others perceive them as being morally corrupt and wrong. Each group begins to look at the other from their own value and intellectual background. So there must be some agreement on a reference to determine the general characteristics of clothing in terms of covering the body.

As I said, the importance of the matter lies in its totality, and if you'll allow me, let's first try and agree on some basis that draws our views closer together.

Michael: Please, go ahead.

Yousef: I think we both agree that it is impossible to find a solution, or even solutions, to the fundamental questions of human life, except after we apprehend the reality of a human being and fully know the truth about him.

Michael: That goes without saying.

Yousef: I think that the remarkable and continuous progress of science that we observe is evidence of the limitedness of human knowledge.

What was hidden from us yesterday is discovered today, and what was thought true yesterday is reviewed and corrected today; and so too that which will be discovered tomorrow was undiscovered today, or was only slightly understood. This is what our Qur'an said: (And of knowledge, you (mankind) have been given only a little.)

Michael: I totally agree with you. But what has that to do with our subject?

Yousef: Bear with me, my friend. I'm not done yet… If we agree on that, it naturally follows that we should admit that there are hidden aspects in matter that we cannot fathom, that is assuming of course that we are able to free ourselves from whims, personal inclinations and environmental influences - which is something very difficult to avoid. But if we start to address these issues under the effect of such influences, we are at risk of confusion, and the measures that we take on these bases will be incomplete or distorted, in fact, it may be opposite to the correct solution.

Michael: This is a logical consequence, but on the other hand, we have no choice except to use our brains, think and make use of the knowledge we have obtained, and sail in the seas of trial, error and correction. This is better than leaving things unresolved and untreated, just waiting to arrive at a point of moderation where matters become steady.

Yousef: So you acknowledge that these solutions must be characterized by some excessiveness or negligence. You, however, think that we are compelled to take such deficient solutions and that we have no other choice.

Michael: Yes, I do.

Yousef: But we have another choice that allows us to avoid such defects.

Michael: What do you mean by "we have"? And what is this solution?

Yousef: I mean, we Muslims have that choice which we consider as a lifeboat for mankind. This choice, in a nutshell, is that He who created mankind knows everything about them. Allah, Exalted Be He, says in the Qur'an: {Should not He Who has created know? And He is the Most Kind and Courteous (to His slaves) All-Aware (of everything).} He alone, Glorified Be He, knows the characteristics of man, his needs, what benefits him and what harms him. He, the Almighty, is at the same time far above all human desires, whims, passions and inclinations. That is

the reason why He alone is capable of creating a clear system or way for mankind, with wisdom and moderation which is manifested in the Qur'an.

Michael (interrupting): Your words Mr. Yousef are consistent. Yet, do not forget that I do not believe in your religion, so do not impose on me what I do not believe in...Talk to me about what we both agree upon, as before.

Yousef: Although this rule is the foundation of belief for every Muslim, and which I think should be the foundation for everyone, I do not mind going on with the dialogue in the manner you want, but of course in light of my convictions, that is, in the context of the social system that I mentioned to you before, of which the headscarf is part and parcel.

Michael: No problem.

Yousef: I mentioned in our last meeting that we cannot ignore the materialism of the body in humans, not only that, but its animal instinct too. A man by nature is attracted to a woman and the first thing that he is attracted to in her is her body. Consequently, adorned and revealing clothing are considered as tools of seduction and arousal, and are an indirect call to men to molest and harass those that wear them.

Michael: But I think that this view it is an insult to both women and men alike. An insult to women, because it focuses only on the bodily dimension of women and neglects their minds, culture and morals. It also looks at them as if they are minors, who do not know how or are unable to protect themselves. It is also an insult to men, depicting them as predatory wolves who only think about their lower parts, and nothing but sex!

Yousef: Do you think, my friend, that when a woman stands in front of a mirror to adorn herself and choose her enticing cloths, that she is doing that to please the higher values of the mind of men, or the nobility in their characters? Or does she do that at least to gain the admiration of men, if not to arouse them or to seek them out? Do you think that when man sees a beautifully adorned woman, he thinks of her wise mind or vast knowledge at the first sight?!!

We all know that human beings are of varying degrees in their feelings and desires, and in their willingness to infringe and abuse, as they are of varying degrees in sublimity, virtue and morality. Hijab signifies that the woman wearing it is chaste and does not want to draw the attention of men to invite them to harass or molest her. Thus, it is a factor that drives

away those who have weak souls and a low moral constitution. The Qur'an clearly states that hijab is a protection for women from immoral people.

Michael: But I see, Mr. Yousef, that the behavior of some women wearing hijab does not correspond with morality, which proves that the matter goes back to factors other than wearing the hijab; such as education and a commitment to moral values.

Yousef: There is some truth in what you are saying. No one can claim that a woman, once she puts on a piece of cloth, will be transformed into a virtuous woman. This does not mean, however, that she should not wear the hijab. If someone poses as a doctor, for example, or if a doctor commits a mistake or takes advantage of his profession, this does not mean that the defect is in this profession. This means that the person himself needs to be corrected. That doctor, or in our case here, the woman wearing the hijab, or anyone else, is ultimately a human being, and human beings have weaknesses. On the other hand, when Islam makes it obligatory for Muslim women to wear hijab as a preventive measure from falling into immorality, or even walking along the path leading to immorality, it does not stop at that, but also builds a complete integrated system of ethics and measures to ensure that human beings actually reach the highest degree of virtue. In short: a virtuous woman is one who wears the hijab, and it is not necessarily that every woman wearing a hijab is a virtuous woman.

Michael: But does that not involve a negative view that is represented in the demonization of the female body? Are we required to abandon this body?

Yousef: Islam makes hijab obligatory, not because a woman's body is something bad that should be hidden, but so as not to arouse the natural sexual desires of men, especially in people who are spiritually and morally weak. Islam makes hijab obligatory to protect women from harassment and rape, and to protect men from arousal and the urge to commit adultery. Moreover, Islamic law takes great steps to keep the emotional feelings of intimacy and sexual arousal only within the marital relationship, and this leads to the cohesion of the social structure.

Michael: But, Mr. Yousef, if hijab is a preventive measure to prevent the attraction of men to women, why should men not also wear it, to prevent

the attraction of women to men. Does a woman not lust over a man as well?

Yousef (laughing): Good question! It is true that Islam imposes limits on how men dress that are less restrictive than the limits on women, and perhaps the reason for that is more apparent when we know the characteristics of each. A recent U.S. study by Dr. Benjamin Hayden, who is a specialist of Neuroscience at Duke University, published in the German (Berliner Morgen Post) newspaper, ascertains that men enjoy looking at attractive women due to the fact that some brain centers force them to exert an effort to enjoy looking at a beautiful woman; while on the contrary, women do not exert any effort to look at handsome men.

Through this study he examined the reasons that make men sometimes exert costly efforts to enjoy looking at a beautiful, attractive woman, although the opposite is the case for women. The examination showed that the marked difference between both sexes is due to the brain; since in the brain of a man there are some centers that are activated when he sees a beautiful woman, which makes him feel comfortable and enjoy what he sees, but women are different since they are not affected in the same way when they see an attractive man.

Among the findings of the study is that the first thing that draws the attention of men in photos of beautiful women is their faces, while women throw a passing glance at the whole picture, without focusing on any particular area.

Another point is that men are bolder and more venturesome in carrying out infringements than women, as studies have shown that the rate of criminality in males generally reach five-fold of that compared to females. If women then close the door to excitement and so do not take the first step, they will prevent men from trespassing beyond their limits or molesting her.

Michael (hastily): I see that it is time for us to catch the train… Let's get going!

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The Woman who is a Queen

The Woman who is a Queen

An hour after the train departed, the two friends, Yousef and Michael, were once again ready to begin a discussion to pass the time while they were travelling.

Michael: We have discussed two issues that are related to women's rights: monogamy and hijab…What do you say that we continue discussing the rest of the issues that I have in mind regarding this subject?

Yousef: That's fine with me, so maybe after that we could close this file.

Michael: The first thing that comes to mind is the role of women. Why do Muslims insist that women do not join men in all walks of life?

Yousef: When we say, my friend, that there is in a human being a materialistic and a animal side, that does not mean that he is similar in his characteristics, aims and results to that of animals. There is a major difference: We find that sexual inclination in humans is much stronger than in animals, while the strength of sexual intercourse is much less than that inclination, unlike in animals.

If we take into consideration what was created innately in women – besides lust and sexual attractiveness – of bashfulness, modesty, refrainment and resistance, we shall conclude from that, and what was said previously, that what is meant by the existence of sexual attractiveness in humans is to achieve a permanent connection between the two human sexes, and not that every sexual impulse in the relationship ultimately becomes a sexual function. This is something that the Qur'an expresses at one place with the word (Sakan), which means repose, and at another place with (Mawada wa rahma), which means affection and mercy. This is concerning the psychological side of the matter…clear?!

Michael: Almost clear!

Yousef: As for the biological side of the matter, researches have proven that women are different from men in everything: from the external appearance to the internal organs and their bodies' molecules and cells, as women's cells are imprinted with female qualities. A woman's skeleton and muscular system is different to that of a man. The entire system of her body is structurally equipped in such a way that prepares her to give birth and rear her children, that is, it is suitable for her role as a mother.

As a woman reaches puberty she gets her menstrual period that affects the functions of all her organs and limbs, not only that but her mood and state of mind are also affected while she is menstruating, let alone what she experiences during the pregnancy period, and after that the postpartum period and then breastfeeding.

In fact, a woman's hormones and psychology are vastly different from that of a man's, as on the other side of man's boldness and toughness, we find woman's bashfulness and vulnerability.

From another aspect: a human child – unlike other animals – needs to be taken care of and brought up by his parents for several years, since that child takes a while until he becomes fit in strength and ability to depend upon himself. This is another desired aim, i.e. the man-woman relationship is not limited to the sexual bond between them, but this bond urges them to cooperate and deal with each other. That is another reason why humans are created to be more caring and loving towards their children than any other animal.

Michael: Then…?

Yousef: All that certainly indicates that a family is the natural form of human life, and we can clearly see the role of each member and his or her function in this structure or unit. This is a role that is suitable for the aims of that unit and its nature (repose, affection and mercy), and is also suitable for the capabilities of each member in that structure or unit.

Michael: I get your meaning. Then the role of a woman is to spread the spirit of affection and attain repose in the family, as well as care for her spouse and her children…

Yousef: Exactly! And man's role is to provide the family with the means of living, including showing traits which are needed in times of trials and tribulations

Michael: But this view leads to the loss of half of the production capacity of the society.

Yousef: On the contrary, this view leads us to profit an entire society, since each member of that society will be in his or her natural place. When women struggled with their own innate inclinations and went out to compete with men in the workplace, they reaped sorrow and brought unhappiness to their families and their husbands as well. The result is an entire unhappy and dissolute society. Women tried again to find a

compromise between their work, their home duties and bringing up their children, but to no avail. Women want to be calm wives, loving mothers and active workers simultaneously, how can that be? Naturally, the result was that other parties interfered to occupy the vacuum women left. Those other parties were not faithful nor were they fit to carry out these roles. Moreover, women's competing with men in work outside of the homes led to women being exposed to intermingling with men, which in turn led to harassments, rape and other crimes against women, not to mention the humiliation and abuse women encounter in their jobs and professions which they occupy.

Michael: If we are discussing the role of women in life as a family role, this will lead us to discuss another issue, which I consider as being a form of discrimination against women. This is the issue of men's guardianship over women.

Yousef: This guardianship is not an unfair favoring of men over women, rather it is a way to organize the family. In any institute there must be a definite description of roles, tasks and functions of each member, bearing in mind his qualifications and abilities. A manager is not higher in his rank as a human than, say, an accountant or a worker, merely because that manager has more authority.

In our practical life we see that an institute or an establishment might enforce some restrictions that the employees must adhere to or abstain from for the higher purpose that the administration and the trustees of that institute or establishment see as necessary. The administration might, for instance, enforce a certain uniform or certain security regulations, or it might impose the performance of certain drills, or enforce regulations that prohibit workers from leaving work and going out of the establishment without permission or from occupying himself with anything other than his work. In fact, some contracts with some establishments may include provisions that enforce restrictions on the worker even after he leaves the company. All that is common-place and cannot be objected to. No one ever viewed such restrictions as being discriminatory or a form of coercion against the company workers, for all that is within the framework of a clear-cut system of regulations. Moreover, you will never find a successful company or an establishment which does not have a manager who has authorities that are in proportion with the responsibilities he carries on his

shoulders and the accountability he might be faced with resulting from such responsibilities.

It is, therefore, necessary for the family institution to succeed in employing a system that is enforced on all its members. Such a system might contain restrictions that must be either adhered to or abstained from. Such an institute must have a leader who has authorities that are in proportion to his responsibilities. He must have the ability to be decisive when there is an absence of agreement on any point of view. He must, at the same time, apply the system and use these authorities in the light of the rule of the family life which we have already mentioned: affection and mercy that achieve the targeted repose.

Michael: If that is the case, then why must guardianship be awarded to men? Why do the women not have that responsibility? Isn't that a tendency to inequality?

Yousef: I wouldn't use the word equality here. I prefer to use justice instead. Yet I say equality or justice should be concerning rights. But what we are looking into here is distributing roles and taking social functions that are suitable to the abilities of each member and to what his or her make-up has been molded to do.

In the family institute, we said that a woman and a man are each made differently, and this make-up suits different social functions. Do not forget that just as men are given the responsibility of guardianship there are other burdens they must attend to, besides the guardianship, that aren't imposed on women. Guardianship in that light is thus an obligation rather than an honor, for it imposes certain responsibilities and liabilities that necessitate being reasonable and wise, and not being hasty in making decisions. This, however, is not belittling to a woman's personality, nor does it mean that she is denied the right of expressing herself.

Women are also not fit to take such a social role since women, as our Prophet Mohammed (mercy and blessings be upon him) said: "Women are deficient in mind and religion."

Micheal: Deficient in mind?! This is a debasing view towards women. Women have proven that they can be superior to men in their scientific abilities and are not less than men in their intelligence.

Yousef (laughing): It's really strange, my friend, that all those to whom I mention that saying of the Prophet understand it exactly as you just

did now. My dear friend, the mind meant here is not intelligence. The mind mentioned here is the ability to precisely control one's evaluation of matters and to have control over one's self and his or her emotions in a way that helps in making sound decisions in times of crisis and critical circumstances. In other words, the mind here is referring to the opposite of being emotional and whimsical. No one can deny that women are naturally more emotional and sentimental than men, this is a psychological characteristic of women and their role must be suitable for that nature. This might also indicate the wisdom in limiting woman's power to end the family unit through divorce. (?)

Michael: If we mention injustice against women and the debasing view towards them, we must mention her rights of inheritance. Why is it that in Islam a woman inherits half of what a man does?

Yousef: First of all, it is not in all cases that the share of a woman in inheritance is half of that of a man's.

The second thing is that for one to have dignity doesn't make it imperative that he must be given the same rights as the next person. Justice doesn't necessitate that everybody is equal in everything all of the time, equality is obligatory when the circumstances and conditions are the same. What I mean is that the nature of women must be taken into consideration, as well as her role in life, and a balance between her rights with her duties must be reached.

In relation to inheritance, for instance: The share that a woman gets is hers alone while the share that a man gets is shared with his wife, children, unmarried sisters and his parents, if they are alive and don't have any other way to support themselves. Aside from the fact the he is the one who presents a dowry to the woman, he is also given the responsibility of providing a house for marriage and furnishing that house. He has to carry the responsibility of spending on his household, wife and children, and he can't force his wife to work, since he has no right to take her money nor property, for women have a totally independent financial entity. This is something that many western women do not enjoy, though the West is always bragging that it is just to them.

Would you like, my friend, that we discuss the status of women in your country?!

Michael: (overwhelmed) I think we should rest a bit.

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Dismantling the Broken House

Dismantling the Broken House

The two friends took a break in which they had a short nap, and then exchanged seats in order to renew their activity. Then Michael started talking.

Michael: I stand to be corrected, but divorce seems quite common in Muslim societies, and I think that one of the reasons for that is that it is permitted in the Muslim faith…

Yousef: … First, my dear friend, let me interrupt by saying that Islam wasn't the first religion to legislate divorce.. Divorce was wide-spread even before Islam in almost the entire world. Before, if a husband felt angry at his wife, whether for a true reason or not, he would simply kick her out of the house. The woman didn't have any rights and couldn't claim any compensation from the man either. If we consider other systems of life and compare them, we have learned from history that when the Greek civilization flourished, divorce was common, without limitations or conditions. As for the Jewish religion, it also permits divorce, however it affords this right to the husband alone, with a decision he takes individually. He has the right to divorce his wife without an excuse, but if there is one then its better. - and let me just mention here that if a woman then marries another husband after being divorced, she can't remarry the first one.

Second: Is divorce really so common in Muslim societies to say that permitting divorce in Islam is the reason for this? Let's discuss some statistics from around the world as another comparison:

In the US, the average divorce rate for the years 1992 - 1995 was 502 divorces per one thousand marriages, and this rate is expected to have increased considerably. Perhaps that is what prompted the American administration to hide the percentage of divorce cases in spite of its declaration of the number of marriages from 1999 until now. In Russia, the average divorce rate in the years 2001-2004 was 750 per one thousand marriages. In Sweden it was 539 per one thousand marriages, and in Britain it was 538 per one thousand marriages during the years 2000-2003.

In Japan, the average divorce rate reached 366 per one thousand marriages in the years 2000-2004.

If we consider Islamic societies, the highest divorce rate was in Kuwait, reaching 347 per one thousand marriages in the years 2000 to 2004. In other countries it was much less. In Jordan, the rate was 184 per one thousand marriages during the years 2000 – 2004, in Palestine, 142.

In Egypt, the rate was 134 during the years 2000 – 2003. In the Syrian society, the divorce rate during the years 2000-2002 was 84. In Libya, 51 during the years 2000-2004, and in Iran the average divorce rate was 97 per one thousand marriages during the years 2000-2003.

Is it true to say then that divorce is prevalent in Muslim societies and that the reason for this phenomenon is that Islam permits it?

Michael: But it is known that Islam is famous for facilitating divorce, when compared to other religions and social systems.

Yousef: This statement opens the floor to more than one topic which needs discussing; allow me to deal with them each in detail.

Michael: Go ahead.

Yousef: The first topic concerns believing, in an absolute sense, that it is an easy matter to divorce in Islam. No legislation of course, or social system, encourages divorce. I might agree with you that divorce may be taken lightly by those who do not adhere to the teachings of Islam and abuse some of the powers granted to them without right. However, at the same time, you should know that the teachings of Islam should not be blamed for this behavior, for these teachings are clear about controlling and organizing this issue in a way that reduces any negative effects. What is happening in some communities is actually the result of their moving away from the essence of the religion of Islam concerning their legislations and regulations.

Michael: Can you clarify this point a bit more?

Yousef: The origin of marriage in Islam is that it is a permanent contract and it is forbidden to limit it to a certain time; which means that married life is supposed to continue between the couple until death separates them. The marriage contract has been described as a firm and strong

covenant, which calls for respecting it, and not intending to break it. Moreover, divorce is an abhorrent issue in Islam except if it is absolutely necessary, and when it is, Islam guides us before going through divorce to make all possible attempts to make amends between the couple and to complete certain actions that limit divorce. If it is still found that divorce is necessary, then the procedures should be accompanied with certain ethics which safeguard the dignity of all parties involved and protect the family:

Islam calls on the husband to retain his wife on reasonable terms and not divorce her because she may have a trait he does not like. Instead, the husband is urged to consider her good traits so as to make him refrain from divorcing her. It protects the sanctity of marriage from being tampered with, and warns against uttering the word of divorce jokingly or taking it lightly. The husband is ordered to control his temper and be patient when correcting his wife. If the couple cannot solve their problems, Islam has given the permission to other parties that are interested in the welfare of the couple to find a solution for the problems between them. Then, the final divorce is done over stages to allow the couple to experience the negativities that result from divorce and to give them a chance to return to each other and reunify their family. This is the reason why Islam does not give a chance to the couple to destroy their marital life from the first dispute that occurs between them, but gives them a three-staged chance. The husband has the authority, after the first and second divorce, to return to his wife. Even after the third, Islam allows the couple to return to each other; however this can only happen after they pass through something which is striking and harsh for the two of them, which includes the divorced woman first marrying and divorcing another man.

Michael: This is the first topic, what else?

Yousef: The other important point is the wrong idea that exists concerning the reality of other non-Muslim communities. In fact, divorce in these communities can take place for trivial reasons, and I am sure you are already aware of that!! In America, for example, judicial proceedings mention that there could be a divorce if one spouse is addicted to the computer, or to following programs or matches on TV. In Canada, it is enough for one spouse to prove that his partner suffers from snoring when

sleeping in order to get an immediate divorce. In Italy, one spouse can be granted a divorce if he/she is forced to carry out household chores. In Britain, taking any of the husband's affairs lightly, even if it was something as small as breaking a souvenir, is considered a justification for a divorce.

As for Japan, the court may agree to pass a judgment of divorce if one partner sleeps in a way that the other doesn't like.

Michael: What you've just mentioned Mr. Yousef is correct, but it happens in secular judicial systems which are separate from religion. Christianity, however, has a known stance towards divorce and it is very strict in preventing it, except in regards to limited faults that are in reality difficult to prove in order to actually obtain a divorce.

Yousef: I would argue that this strictness agrees neither with human nature, nor with human life. This is clear in the case of some Christians living in Muslim countries who see the difference between the two religions, and may even leave their religion to escape that hardship when they reach a milestone in their social life and have no solution in their religion to the nature of life and its complexities.

This is what distinguishes Islam from other ways of life. While Islam makes it obligatory that the marriage contract is for life, it knows that its legislations are for people who live on earth, who have human characteristics, temperaments and for which circumstances may change. Islam therefore allows, at the same time, a margin for having made an error in choice that may not be clear except after a certain experience. It takes into account that the change in these conditions, or falling into this error, may result in negativities of varying degrees. These negativities may be bearable sometimes, but they may be serious and unbearable other times, and may lead to psychological, social and even material losses. Islam, thus, prescribes how the couple is to handle these errors if they find living together is impossible and ways to make amends between them fail. Islam, with regards to this point, is definitely realistic, and absolutely fair to both men and women, and the entire family, as correcting one's life, even if it entails separation and starting anew, is better than torturing all the members of the family with the flame of disagreements and discord, or to continue with a marriage in which the true purpose and objectives of marriage are absent. The two most important purposes and objectives

are, psychological repose, through love and compassion, and also the establishment of a stable and successful family. Divorce in Islam is a treatment and a correction of one's life, an opportunity for change, and a chance given to start a new, more successful life.

I think that legislating divorce with the controls mentioned in Islam illustrates the tolerance of this religion, and how it is realistic.

Michael: But why does Islam make divorce a right solely given to men alone, is not that being unjust to women?

Yousef: Again, the matter should be viewed through a total framework that takes into account all dimensions. What I mean is that we should look at this through a complete social system, that starts with marriage itself and its objectives, and passes through the concept of the family and the function of each party in that family, and each party's responsibilities, duties and rights.

Here, we must mention that it has been scientifically proven that women are inherently more emotional and moody than men, which makes men more aware and appreciative of the consequences of this matter, and better able to control their temper, and curb the passion of anger and rage.

In Islam, the husband alone suffers the financial losses of a divorce and he is responsible for the financial demands after the divorce. Undoubtedly, these financial expenses that result from making the decision to divorce are additional reasons why couples should have prudence and restraint.

However, even though it gives the right for divorce to men alone, it does not neglect to legislate that a wife can be granted a separation from her husband if she has a good reason. This is what is known as khul' (that is, divorce at the instance of the wife), with regulations and legislations that safeguard the rights of all parties.

Would you now like, my dear friend, to talk about the status of women in your country?!

Michael: I think that we should first have lunch.

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Woman after liberation

Woman after liberation

When Yousef and Michael finished eating their lunch, Yousef looked up and said to his friend:

Yousef: My dear Michael, you have showered me with arrows of criticism, and put my very civilization in the dock.

Michael: They aren't arrows or charges, my friend, but a dialogue and criticism aimed at reaching the truth, and I think we have come a long way in achieving the truth through these dialogues and the explanations associated with them. The other thing, in my defense, is that I am used to your tolerance and forbearance, did I annoy you with what I said earlier?!

Yousef: No, no, I wasn't annoyed, but I meant that in order to paint the full picture, we must tackle it from all its aspects, and compare the situations of women in our civilization and in yours. I think that our conversations earlier about women provide a considerable idea on the perception of the issue of women in the Islamic civilization. What remains for us now is to look at this issue from the perspective of your civilization too.

Michael (laughing): Here I am then, opening my chest for arrows and being put in the dock.

Yousef (smiling): Why do we have to put ourselves in positions of combat? Our relationship should allow us to have a discussion that is cooperative, aiming at reaching the truth - as you've just mentioned.

Michael: I totally agree with you. Where would you like to begin?

Yousef: I think that the first issue that should be addressed is the status of women found in the references present in the culture.

Michael: The perception of women and how to treat them varies depending on how individuals view them and on their assessment of women depending on where these individuals were brought up, their culture and their education. The issue here isn't the place of women in this book or even that reference.

Yousef: True, but we, at the same time, can't ignore references which form the culture of this individual and his values, and affect his views and perceptions. And when I say references, I don't mean just books or

scientific references, but also everything that may affect the formation of the consciousness of an individual and his culture. Some old folk tales and legends might form a part of these references that take the form of folklore, as well as proverbs and wise sayings that are taken from the stock of the collective unconscious to mold the individual conscious. In this way, references, in turn, affect their upbringing and education.

Michael: I think that the statuses of women and the perception of them do not differ that much in the Holy scriptures. In our holy book, the status is very similar to that of your Qur'an. This perception is summarized in: How women were created, that they were created from man, and that they were the cause of the first sin and being driven out of Paradise, as well as their social position and responsibility.

Yousef: I disagree with some aspects of what you have just said; the details of the issue of the first sin and Adam and Eve being driven out of Paradise is different in the Qur'an to that of your Bible. In the Qur'an, Eve isn't responsible for Adam being tempted by Satan, and therefore the blame of being banished from Paradise is not cast onto women.

Regarding the perception of the female and her place in society, it is stated in the Bible that the birth of girls doubles the impurity of the mothers! The Bible says: "… If a woman has conceived a seed and bore a man child (male), then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean… And she will continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days. She shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purif be fulfilled… But if she bear a maid child (female), then she shall be unclean for two weeks, as in her separation; and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying threescore and six days."

As for the actions of women in the society from the standpoint of Christianity: women are forbidden to speak in the church. In Corinthians it is said: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted to them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also said the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." All of this has no similarity what-so-ever in the Qur'an.

Michael: Generally, the development that took place in our societies cannot be understood if it is not linked to the roots of the Greek and Roman cultures, that intermingled with them, let alone the influence of the reforms of the Protestant religious movement, in addition to the influence of the ideas of the Renaissance and the impact of the French Revolution, and the transformation of society during the Industrial Revolution.

Yousef: As you've mentioned the Greek and Roman cultures, there is a lot of confusion in the perception of women in the era which we are considering, or even the actual civilization which we cite. When we page through the history of Greek women, we find that they had neither freedom, will, nor any social status. Women were debased and regarded as animals that were bought and sold. These cultures denied women the right to act for themselves and deprived them legally of their right to inherit. When the Greek civilization evolved and progressed, the status of Greek women changed radically and rapidly. Women began faring clubs and mingling with men, which led to the spread of immorality and adultery. Whorehouses were considered as centers of politics and literature, and statues of naked women were erected in the name of literature and art.

Despite some differences in details, the position that the Roman civilization took towards women was not, in reality, significantly different as they were disdained and deemed as being inferior to men, who were allowed to behave as they wished. Roman law deprived women from most of their civil rights in the various stages of their lives. Then the Roman theory about women started to change, and it continued to do so until alterations occurred in their systems and their laws concerning family, marriage and divorce contracts. The entire issue was turned upside-down, and the marriage contract ceased to have any meaning. Women were granted all rights of inheritance and ownership. As a result, their view changed so that relationships and affairs between men and women without any legal contracts became acceptable.

Michael: Let me add that, in general, an interaction, influence and impact took place between the Greek and Roman standpoints on the one hand, and the views of the clergy on the other hand, when Christianity entered Europe, and the clergy's view about women were affected by the reality that they lived in.

Yousef: That's right, as early Christian clergy were horrified by what they saw in the Roman society from the spread of immorality and evil, and the outrageous moral decay of the society. They considered women responsible for all of that; and declared that women were the doors to evil and that they should be ashamed of their beauty, since it was a weapon of Satan's temptation and seduction… The western contempt of women continued and they once again deprived them of their rights throughout the Middle Ages. This even continued in the era of Chivalry, in which it was thought that women gained some social status, as they were still considered as minors with no right to dispose of their properties without the permission of their husbands.

Michael: But, my dear friend, do you not think that our conversation has turned into a history class?! We can skip this stage to reach the beginning of the transformations that led to the era in which we live, and I mean by that, the Renaissance and the French Revolution and its aftermath.

Yousef: It's not a history lesson; it's a search to find the roots. I see a close relationship between these attitudes and opinions that you consider as history and the reality of women in the West today, although there are still some differences.

Don't you notice similarities between these historical facts and the terms used and paths of women's rights in the West?!

Michael: Such as…?

Yousef: Such as: exploiting women for entertainment and enjoyment; while Western women thought they had won their rights when laws were passed that gave them the same rights of men in all areas, they discovered that they had become, in many cases, nothing more than a mere toy in the hands of men. They became subordinates of men, named after their husbands rather than their fathers and having no financial entity of their own. Women remained to be a mere shadow of their husbands, who blocked their characters, and that curse was not lifted until the beginning of the twentieth century.

Michael: But in the end, women were granted their rights and received the same rights as men in all areas. They were even employed in many different types of jobs.

Yousef: But oppression of women in the West and the loss of their rights, despite it being lifted a little, or lifted only theoretically by issuing some laws and conventions, is still actually practiced on a large scale, though the label of injustice or its motives may have changed. For in the name of this movement, men use women as traps to collect money and as a ride for having fun and pleasure. Women have been turned into mere commodities and bodies to satisfy customers in places of entertainment and have become means to rake in money for advertisers. This is the worst form of disrespect for the dignity of women. But women in several countries have started to retaliate and have called for the prevention of their exploitation in commercial advertising.

A Swedish judge, Dr Homer, commented on women's liberation and equality: "Swedish women suddenly discovered that they had bought a huge illusion - referring to the freedom that had been given to them – for an alarming price, which was their real happiness."

A report by the European Commission described the state of women in Western countries and said that the call for emancipation of women and the claims of them attaining their rights were just empty slogans that didn't make sense and were not true. The report stated that companies in Europe aren't doing enough to break down the imaginary barrier which prevents women from landing senior management jobs.

Anna Diamantopoulou, the European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, said: "The business world clearly shows the disparity between the sexes, for while women hold between 20% and 30% of senior official and management jobs in the public sector in Europe, their share of the top jobs in private companies is no more than 2 % in France, 3% in Germany and 6.3% in Britain, and their share in the top jobs in banks has remained at 5%."

The European Commission focused on the continued existence of inequality between women's salaries and men's salaries, especially in management positions, where women earn 16% less than men ...

Michael (interrupting): I see that the train is entering the terminus... We should prepare our luggage and collect our personal belongings now.

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Discrimination wears the Mask of Civilization

Discrimination wears the Mask of Civilization

After two and a quarter hours of traveling, the two friends finally reached their destination, Paris, which Yousef had never visited before. They left the railway station (Michael seemed to know Paris very well) and he revealed that there was an intimate relationship between him and Paris.

Michael: Yousef, this is Paris, the capital of light… This is from where the world learned the emblem of liberty, fraternity and equality. This is where the principles of human rights were raised.

Yousef: (Surprised and pointing ahead.) Look! Look Michael! This woman is being stopped by a policeman, though it doesn't seem like she has committed a crime or any contravention.

Michael: Oh! Her face is covered with a veil. The act of banning the wearing of al-Niqab (face-covering veil) in public spaces in France was applied two days ago. Maybe he's stopping her to fine her for violating this law, or to perhaps even arrest her.

Yousef: (Sarcastically and rhetorically.) In public places?! This means that the law permits the woman to wear al-Niqab inside her house... Masha'a Allah! [1] What a liberty for women and Muslims! I do now recall this law and also remember that it is not applied in France only, but there is also a similar law in Belgium, and that it was applied by a country north of Italy too. And this brings to mind that there are raging efforts in Holland and Australia and other countries to pass similar acts. In Australia, policemen have been authorized by the government to uncover the faces of veiled women in order to identify them.

Michael: I personally believe that this banning prevents women from practicing their personal liberty in wearing what they want and passing this law is considered a retrogression of liberties in France; it is a real prejudice on personal freedoms in a country that has more than one hundred acts that demand others freedoms.

But here they see that it goes along with the principles of their secular country that prohibits the use of religious slogans. Moreover, French

(1) Mā šā Allāh (ar. ما شاء الله) is an Arabic phrase that expresses appreciation, joy, praise or thankfulness for an event , but here it is said ironically. (It literally means Allah so willed.)

authorities describe al-Niqab as a new type of slavery which, on these grounds, will never be accepted by the French Republic.

Yousef: Secular principles ban the country or its organizations from the use of religious slogans, but they don't enforce the ban on individuals. So, why is this ban enforced upon only Muslims? Does it apply to the woman who wears a cross on her chest or those wearing nuns' uniforms?! How odd is their notion of slavery?! Isn't driving women to nudeness and allowing any man to enjoy her body a form of slavery? But when she willingly covers her whole body, it is then called slavery? (Sarcastically) Yes, sir, it is a form of slavery indeed! (Seriously) It is a slavery to God; the Lord of all creatures.

Now I understand the concept of liberty used in the French revolutionary slogan… it is the liberty from any commitment to God and from worshipping Him; not the liberty from being subdued by the creatures. This liberty originated from the authority of the secular state that occupied the status of God and monopolized the distribution of this liberty; permitting it to whomever and delimiting it however they wanted to. They used to say, "Your liberty ends where others' liberty starts." Do they consider looking at the bodies of women a liberty and right, for which the liberty of Muslim women should be restricted?! It is not a matter of the hair or a face veil, but it all boils down to Europe's fear of Islam.

Michael: Don't make a big thing about it, Mr. Yousef. In Europe, many Muslims live and enjoy their rights, just like others, and have a chance of education and job opportunities which are not available in their own countries.

Yousef: I'm not making a big thing about it, but there is a lot of evidence that proves what I call 'Islamaphobia'.

Michael: Like what?

Yousef: Like prohibiting building minarets in Switzerland; the guardian of human rights; the country of neutralism and the Geneva Conventions. What harm or problems can be caused to the society by the minarets in a country in which Muslims do not constitute more than 4%?! There are only four minarets there!! It is crystal clear that this prohibition is a result of their phobia and aggressive attitudes towards Islam.

Michael: Though I personally don't support (or approve of) this prohibition, I understand that they view these minarets as a contradiction of the values of their state and also as a danger that threatens the identity of their country.

Yousef: Of course, when taking into consideration that this prohibition doesn't include all the religious symbols of the temples; like church towers and Jewish temples, then I come to realize the limits of secularism upon which their country is established, as they claim, and the reality of their so-called equity ... And it doesn't stop there, they have proceeded to take down each and every symbol of Islam, even if it is Prophet Muhammad himself (mercy and blessings be upon him), as we have seen in the crisis of the offensive caricature of our Prophet that took place in Denmark and other countries that took part in this aggression.

Michael: Sir, this is freedom of speech and in our country there is nothing considered sacred or prohibited with regards to freedom of speech. Even Jesus Christ himself and other religious symbols have had their share of criticism and ridicule.

Yousef: But you have sacred things which cannot be touched; not by freedom of speech, nor by freedom of scientific research. After publishing the offensive caricature in the Danish newspapers, the infection seemed to spread to a number of other European countries and was adopted and defended by a number of western governments; though it defames the greatest religious symbols of one and a half milliard Muslims, (disgusted) and they refused to apologize using the plea of freedom of speech... But a Dutch appellate court fined a group of Dutch Muslims 2500 Euros for publishing a caricature suggesting that the Holocaust was an imagination of the Jews and that they exaggerated over its reality. The court justified this, on the basis of the European court of Human Rights, which makes a big deal over the freedom of speech and defends it strongly, excluding any denial of the Holocaust or any underestimation of it from the limits of freedom of speech.

In 1998, one of the French courts judged the French author Garaudy on the charge of questioning the Jewish Holocaust, for just questioning the commonly accepted number of the European Jewish genocide carried out by the Nazis.

In 2006, an Austrian court sentenced the British Historian David Irving to three years imprisonment for denying the widely accepted details about the Jewish Holocaust.

In 2009, the German judicial authorities fined the British Catholic bishop, Richard Williamson, 10,000 Euros because he declared that the number of Jewish victims that died in the Nazi genocide ranged between only 200,000 and 300,000 persons.

And there are many others who were not able to exercise their right of freedom of research and freedom of speech in this so called “sanctuary”.

Michael: Definitely, a long history of mutual enmity between Christians and Muslims, in addition to the recent cases of bigotry and Islamic violence, makes a lot of people fear Islam in a way that has no comparison, for example, Hinduists and Buddhists. Do you deny that some of the Muslims behavior played a significant role in creating this phobia of Islam?

Yousef: Here we come really close to the reality of it all. I don’t deny that the behavior of some individuals and sects of Muslims create the pretences that are exploited by hostile parties in stirring up enmity towards and a phobia of Islam and Muslims. Meanwhile, we should put things in their proper place and give them their true size. We cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that there are other dimensions for the hostile campaign against Islam and Muslims. Using these actions that you have mentioned, they intend to achieve the goals of these dimensions in the interest of racial groups or groups that are anti-Islam and against Muslims. If we trace the actions objectively and impartially, we shall find that there is no religious or racial sect that does not have some members who exhibit some hostile or criminal actions. However, drawing attention to these actions, camouflaging them, or even passing over them places some actions in the highlight so they are observed and followed, while others are forgotten.

Michael: What do you mean by other dimensions?

Yousef: I shall mention some, but not all:

In the past, Europe opened the door for Arabs and Muslims to immigrate for certain purposes; among which were: increasing the European population to compensate for the imbalanced increasing

population resulting from the disorganization of the European family and Europeans turning away from giving birth. Of course this openness was not aimed at the elderly who were absorbed with the Islamic customs and traditions, rather they sought the new generation that would be born in the West and that could be easily submitted to a process of cultural molding; in order to form the social, cultural and civilizational tissue in the west fifty years later. This is how the western strategists planned.

However, these strategists then noticed that the Islamic awakening which started in the Islamic World had moved to the Western World and had become an obstacle in the completion of merging Muslim immigrants and their sons into the western civilizational tissue. In this way, the children of the veiled women or the committed Islamic families are more exposed to being adherent to their religious values and genuine Islamic principles; which those strategists consider as an obstacle in the face of fully implementing their policy of merging.

This generation of the children of Muslims is a source of concern for they threaten to disperse the merging projects in the west. Thus the west found itself confronting a real problem in the emergence of a developing human mass that carries the characteristics of a civilizational identity which is different from that of the western one.

Then, the main reason for these racial campaigns is the west's feeling of bitterness due to the dangers of their loss of identity, which resulted in the disturbance of any Islamic symbol or even its appearance. They fear that if they pass over these simple aspects, then the rest of the Islamic system will crawl all over them. Therefore they decided to kill it in the cradle. The clash of civilization has to deal with Islam now, as expressed in the call raised by the American thinker, Samuel Phillips Huntington, in his book "The Clash of Civilizations", which describes the intellectual and political currents in the west.

Michael: We have arrived at the hotel and the topic you have opened needs a lot of discussion.

With Freud in a Parisian Cafe

With Freud in a Parisian Cafe

After the two friends had arrived at Paris, they spent the rest of the day searching for a suitable place to lodge, and finally decided to stay at a Youth Hostel in Paris. They clearly needed a rest, so they spent the rest of that night catching up on sleep. The next day the two friends went sightseeing in the city and passed by a cafe.

Michael: What do you say, Yousef. Let's sit down and have a cup of tea here.

Yousef: I don't mind. I feel that I really need a short break anyway.

Michael: Did you know that Sigmund Freud, the famous psychiatrist, used to sit at this cafe. Have you heard of him?

Yousef: Yes, his name is associated with a school of psychoanalysis in psychology. He is also associated with the call to be detached from ethics and the call to pornography.

Michael: For us he is an important scientist, regardless of the associations that you've just mentioned.

Yousef: As a matter of fact, I think he is one of the pillars of thought that formed the civilization of modern Western societies, after Darwin, Marx, Durkheim and Sartre. Each of them carried out their role in shaking the Western thought and re-forming it according to the new sanctities of the West. Each of them played a role in destroying religion, morality and tradition.

Darwin's theory of evolution was the spark that fired two dangerous missiles of thought, which were used by those who came after him to damage the ideological foundations of the time. The first missile spread the idea of constant evolution, which eliminated the idea of stability, and thus indicated the relativity of all values, ideas and perceptions. The second missile was the suggestion that humans are purely animalistic and materialistic, and that only materialistic factors affect him, completely ignoring the spiritual aspect, and denying that this man has been created by God, either directly or via the process of evolution. This was the strong impetus that resulted in destroying the established concepts about major philosophical questions on God, Man the universe and fate.

The role of Freud included that he referred to man as a group of sexual complexes, and denied that the human mind directs man's manners. He also said that the main motive of a human in his or her daily life is that of pleasure. In that sense, the system of morality was demolished; It became unprogressive and backward, and was described as being unrealistic and unscientific.

Michael: I think that there are factors common to all human civilizations and there are special factors that characterize each civilization from the other. These concepts which you mentioned before are common to all civilizations, but each culture is different from the other in the way in which they present these concepts. One civilization gives precedence to one of these concepts over the remaining two, and tackles them in light of the first concept.

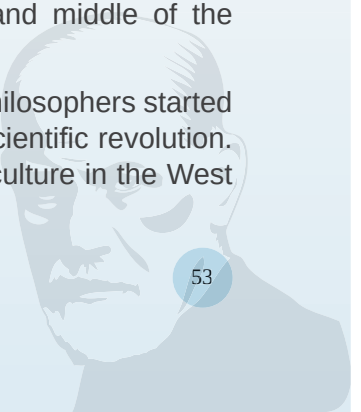
After the Renaissance, Contemporary European Civilization was dominated by the concept of the universe, and when scientific thought began to spread, a new kind of thinking prevailed that canceled out the origin of God's creation of man and brought about the materialistic view in its place. Thus, the spiritual dimension in man was killed, and indeed it cannot be denied that Darwin was one of the great thinkers who founded this direction.

Yousef: I completely agree with that, but I draw your attention to several issues regarding what you've just said:

The first is that the main reason for the clear revolution of ideas at the time was the existence of a spiritual and scientific vacuum in the Western society. There was also the dominance of the church and its insistence on erroneous views concerning the creation and life, which the church deemed a necessary part of their belief.

The second, which is one of the most common mistakes, is the belief that the cause of progress in the West is its adoption of those views and theories that were common at the beginning and middle of the Renaissance period.

Thirdly, views and theories of these thinkers and philosophers started collapsing, one theory after the other, after the real scientific revolution. Despite this, many of those who do not have much culture in the West



and East are still under the influence of the strong propaganda that supports these ideas.

As for what you've just mentioned about the common concepts between civilizations, it reminds me of an unusual comparison between Freud's theory in the interpretation of human behavior and the words of one Muslim scholar which was recorded some seven hundred years ago.

Michael: It's very unusual that there are similarities between Freud's words and the Islamic concepts of a Muslim scholar at that time.

Yousef: It is not a similarity in concepts, but a similarity that can be called a "similarity in structure". In order to make the matter clearer: Do you know what the Freudian idea about the components of the human psychic apparatus is?

Michael: Yes, I know it well. Basically, Freud imagined that just as human bodies have biological functions that organize biological processes, such as the digestive and circulatory system, etc., the human body also has a psychic apparatus that consists of parts that are related to each other.

This apparatus consists of what he called: the Id, the superego, and the ego.

The Id is the area consisting of special urgent instincts, desires, repressed experiences and primitive tendencies constantly waiting, restlessly and blindly, to be present in the area of consciousness, to realize its desires in accordance with the principle of pleasure.

The Id is the first component of the psychic apparatus to be formed. It consists of what a human carries at birth and all that which will be determined by his special composition. The Id represents the impact of genetics.

The superego represents the set of social values, principles and ideals, that is, the impact of what a person receives from others; and includes the impact of education and moral values acquired by the child from his parents, his school and society, the influence of family, and ethnic, national and religious traditions. This is in addition to the requirements of the direct social milieu that they represent. The superego of a child is also affected in the course of its development by the successors of

the parents or their surrogates, such as educators and people in the community who represent revered ideals. This superego also limits the complete fulfillment of all instinctive or sensual acts, since it represents the conscience, for it is the area of idealism that is far from realism, and it always demands reaching perfection, not pleasure - according to Freud.

As for the ego, it can be described as the result of conflict, compatibility or interaction between the Id and the superego, between the desires based on the principle of pleasure and the ideals and principles based on control and restriction. The ego is the watchful sense that resolves the crisis existing with reality, or between desires, to maintain a balanced personality. Ultimately, it is the outcome of the human personality manifested in its external behavior.

The superego, which is that aspect which is separate from the ego and represents the role of a supervisor over the ego, warns the ego against submitting to the Id and responding to repressed desires.

Yousef: Excellent explanation Michael! You've explained it as if you're Freud himself sitting in the cafe, sipping a cup of tea...

But allow me to continue this vibrant explanation by adding that Freud recognized the difficulty of the task carried out by the ego in the psychic apparatus. This difficult, if not impossible, task is to reconcile between contradictory requirements, since the ego has to meet the requirements of the Id, which are mainly sexual desires, and at the same time take into account the requirements of the external environment (the superego), which are moral and social requirements. That is the reason why the process of reconciliation seems difficult. The ego thus seeks to build a relationship of understanding and reconciliation with the Id and seeks to satisfy its desires. It, however, clashes with the superego and the reality that regulates sexual relations according to certain criteria, often leading to the suppression and repulsion of sexual desires. If the ego is able to balance between the Id, the superego and reality, the individual lives in harmony. If, however, the Id or the superego overcomes the personality, this leads to its discomfiture, for the failure of the ego to find a balance between these conflicting desires leads to psychological problems.

The dangerous aspect here is that if we say that mental health, in this sense meaning the ego, complies with the Id, representing here

desires and sensual tendencies, and with the superego, representing here values, principles and ideals, and that failure to meet the wishes of the Id leads to frustration, and keeping in mind that we can't change the Id, then what is left for us in order to reach this compliance is to change the superego and destroy it, if necessary. It was therefore necessary to drive religion and moral ideals out of our lives, and replace them with opportunistic ethics compatible with the human lusts and sexual and selfish desires that satisfy the Id. This is exactly what happened in the West, when religion and ethics were distanced, and passions and sexual relations were unleashed, undisciplined by ethical restrictions. The West established its civilization on these bases. The family was demolished; in fact the humanity of humans was lost, since there was no longer anything to distinguish it from the irrational animal society, which does not know the rules of ethics outside the framework of nature and instinct. Here we are returning to Darwin, after we started with him!!!

Michael: You mean to say that if pent desires always seek to be gratified, and this gratification is achieved either directly or indirectly, then that leads, according to your understanding of Freud and his school, to the conclusion that a civilization that is based on principles, ideals and moral values is a civilization that is the result of repression.

Yousef: Yes, for when the Western civilization produces moral values, it does not takethe sanctity of God into account. Muslims, on the other hand, see that the source of morality in human societies should be from a divine law, not from the mind; because the mind alone will certainly deviate, but if the mind is in the context of that divine law, then the morals that it produces will be sublime morals.

Michael: But you did not tell me, Yousef, what that Muslim scholar you mentioned earlier said. Did what he say agree with what we've just said, or was he against it?

Yousef: What he said was within a system of values and concepts, and our review of this system and putting his words in context will take us a long time, I think that we should postpone that for the next dialogue.

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The Human Soul between two Paths

The Human Soul between two Paths

The youth hostel in which Yousef and Michael stayed was a great place for them. In addition to the inexpensive accommodation, it also contained gardens, gyms and places of recreation, such as entertainment and communication facilities, and most important of all, a large number of guests of similar age and cultural interests.

Michael and Yousef settled at one of the tables in a meeting hall and each of them ordered their favorite drink, then Michael spoke.

Michael: Let's begin where we left off in the previous dialogue with that issue concerning what that scholar you mentioned, the one from your religion, said and whether it agrees with or opposes what we were discussing.

Yousef: The issue here is not whether it agrees with it or not. Islam is an integrated, unique and completely independent system, based on clear foundations, but I won't elaborate on clarifying that for you. The name of that scholar is Ibnul-Qayyim. He spoke in his books about the relationship between the heart, the nafs (the spirit or the self), and the mind. I would like, however, to point out first that what he said was part of the system of values and concepts that are consistent with the foundations on which the Islamic civilization was constructed. With that in mind, I shall continue with what I previously said and add a clarification of the difference between this system and the implications of Freud's theory that formed a large part of the reality of Western society and its ethics.

Michael: In order to gain time, let me briefly explain the last part of what you said and please correct me if I say anything that you disagree with.

Yousef: Be my guest.

Michael: Several models of personality have been deducted from Freud's theory. They are as follows:

If primitive or animalistic instincts and desires, referred to as the Id, overpower the personality (the ego), the type of personality that will result is a selfish or wicked one which violates other's rights and which seeks only to satisfy its own instincts and to fulfill their animalistic wishes, crushing in its path values, customs and the sacred superego.

If values, customs and the superego overpower the personality (the ego), the personality of the unrealistic monk and an impractical ideal

results, crushing in its path primitive instincts and desires.

The healthy, stable or reassuring personality exists when there is a balance and harmony between desires and instincts on the one hand, and values and external constraints on the other. This happens by suppressing some of these instincts in some situations or transgressing limits and values in others, depending on the situation itself.

Yousef: Perfect! We have come to the difference between this theory and Western civilization, a theory which the Western civilization socially embodies, on the one hand, and the Islamic system on the other... This difference can ultimately be seen in the state of rivalry and conflict between the Id and the superego, with neither of them giving in to the other, which affects the intricate balance and complete integration of all dimensions of man, in all spheres of life. The secret of the solution to this lies in implementing what I call "forbidding the tyranny of rights."

Michael: This is the first time I have heard about this "tyranny of rights," and I would like to hear from you how a right can be tyrannical, but let me first tell you that your words acknowledge the idea of the components of the psychic apparatus.

Yousef: The idea of the components of the psychic apparatus is what I referred to earlier, that one of the Muslim scholars, in fact several Muslim scholars, mentioned something similar to it hundreds of years ago. Look at what one of these scholars says in one of his books.

Yousef took out a book and started reading.

Yousef: "Matters are four: A disliked matter that leads to another disliked matter; a disliked matter that leads to a liked matter, a liked matter that leads to another liked matter; and finally a liked matter that leads to a disliked matter. The liked matter that leads to another liked matter comprises two reasons that motivate one to perform it. On the other hand, the disliked matter that leads to another disliked matter comprises two reasons that motivate one to abandon it.

The remaining sections are pulled back and forth between the two conditions: [The condition of performing and that of abandoning] – which are the realms of trials and tests; for the nafs, that is the self, prefers that condition from these two that is closer to it, in other words which can be reached sooner. Reason and belief, however, prefer what is of more benefit and more lasting. The heart is in between these two conditions. It

inclines to one condition one time and the next another time."

Muslim scholars have mentioned, deducting texts from the Qur'an and Prophetic Hadeeth, which are sayings of our Prophet Muhammed (may Allah's mercy and blessings be upon him), that when the mind, (the superego), is inactive, the desires of the Id are active, without having any control or supervision.

Do you not see similarities in the function of the self and the Freudian Id, and reason and belief and the superego, and the heart and the ego?

Michael: Then what they say is similar to great extent.

Yousef: There is a considerable and decisive difference between this explanation and the other. It is a difference which distinguishes this system from that. This difference lies in the words of Ibnul-Qayyim: "... they are the realm of trials and tests..." For while the Freudian view is that the health of the personality (the ego), the heart according to Ibnul-Qayyim, lies in its response to the instincts of the Id (the nafs), and its desires, the Islamic system views the appeals of these instincts and desires in the Id (the nafs), and the need to fulfill them as being, in reality, a test and a trial from God that should not be blindly fulfilled to satisfy the Id (the self). And it should neither be subdued nor confiscated for the sake of the superego (reason and belief), as the case is in monasticism.

This moderation and balance you will not be able to find except in Islam; the control of the desires and instincts and, at the same time, satisfaction of the needs of human instincts without causing any clash between reason and belief, and without any "tyranny of rights."

Michael: What do you mean then by "tyranny of rights"?

Yousef: What I mean is that the upper values and virtuous ethics have rights. But also desires and instincts have rights too. Islam prohibits that one of the values, ethics, desires or instincts impinges upon the other, claiming that it is a higher value or that the need for it is overwhelming. To make it clearer to you, I will mention a Hadeeth of the Prophet of Islam. A group of three men came to the homes of the Prophet, asking about how he used to carry out his acts of worship. When they heard the reply they were under the impression that his acts of worship were few. But they thought that this was the case because the Prophet had an advantage over them, so they came to the conclusion that because they had more sins, they would have to considerably increase their acts

of worship to the extent that would affect their natural needs. One of them said: “I will pray all through the night and I will not sleep.” Another said: “I will fast (abstain from food, drink and having intercourse from dawn to sunset) everyday and will not break my fast.” And a third said: “I will keep away from women and never marry.” Then the Messenger of Allah came to them and said: “Are you the ones who said such and such? By Allah! I’m the most fearing among you of Allah and the most pious, yet I fast and break my fast, and pray and sleep, and I marry women. He who turns away from my sunnah (example) is not of me.” These men laid down extra religious acts stemming from the superego, which were essentially virtues, rights and desirable, but that was at the expense of other rights, even if these rights are for the nafs (the Id). In another Hadeeth, this principle is clear: “... Your Lord, Allah, has a right over you, and your nafs has a right over you, and your family has a right over you, so give each their due right...” In the Qur’an there are several Ayas, that is verses, which indicate this principle, including: (But seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and [yet], do not forget your share of the world. And do good as Allah has done good to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters.”) (Surat Al-Qassas: 77). Allah also says: (And do not make your hand [as] chained to your neck or extend it completely and [thereby] become blamed and insolvent.) (Surat Isra: 29). Perhaps you might know, my friend, that Islam has forbidden monasticism.

For according to Islam, a human should satisfy his mind and conscience, fulfill the commands of his religion, and satisfy his natural needs, without any conflict, collision or confusion.

While Yousef and Michael were deep in their discussion, a young man, who had been sitting at a table near them listening to them, approached and stood in front of them and asked.

The young man: Do you mind if I join you?

Michael and Yousef: Gladly, please do.

The young man: Actually I have been attracted by your dialogue and would be grateful if we could become acquainted and if you would allow me to join the discussion.

Michael: I have no objection.

Yousef: Welcome, Welcome. This is my friend Michael. He’s from Britain

and works as a teacher. I'm Yousef from Egypt. I work as a writer and journalist.

The young man: Pleased to meet you both. Allow me to introduce myself. I'm Rajiv from India. I'm studying engineering in Germany and I'm here in Paris to visit some of my friends.

Michael and Yousef: It's a pleasure to meet you, Rajiv.

Yousef continues with the discussion.

Yousef: So we see that Western psychologists do not view the self except through defects, diseases, illnesses and defaults. In Islam, however, the self carries with it both good and evil, and it is possible to alter the condition of the self and to change it fundamentally, taking it out of the darkness of animality to the peak of moral perfection, without colliding with human nature or belittling its needs.

Rajiv: I deduce from your dialogue that if pent-up desires are always searching for satisfaction, which they achieve either directly or indirectly, then that leads to the view that a civilization which is based on principles, ideals and values is one which is an outcome of repression, according to Freudian concepts.

And that the European civilization, when producing moral values, does so only through the predominance of the concept of the universe, giving priority to the human being as the master of this universe; all of which originated from the idea of removing the idea of God from culture. In the Islamic civilization, however, the concept of God prevails, though it does not crush the entity of the human being.

Yousef: This is conclusive evidence that the source of morality in human societies has to be revelation, and not the mind, as if the mind is used alone, it will definitely deviate. If, however, the mind works in the framework of revelation, then the ethics produced are the correct ones.

Michael: Your presence Rajiv will enrich our conversations. I think that we should meet tomorrow at the same time and in the same place to start a new dialogue, is that alright for both of you?

Rajiv: Yes, that'll suit me fine.

Yousef: Please accept my invitation to both of you to have lunch together at the same time, in honor of our new friend, Rajiv.

Michael and Rajiv: Gladly.

Our Need for faith

Our Need for faith

The three friends met as agreed in the hostel restaurant, and after going through the menu, Michael and Yousef decided on what they wanted to order, while Rajiv contemplated over the list a little longer, and then said:

Rajiv: I noticed that most restaurants don't bother to offer full vegetarian meals, but anyway, it seems I can order a suitable meal here.

Michael: So you are a vegetarian then.

Rajiv: Yes, approximately 40% of India's population are vegetarian.

Yousef: But is it for religious or health reasons?

Rajiv: Actually, in the Hindu religion, which I used to follow, eating beef is completely forbidden, and in India being a vegetarian is very common among the adherents of Hinduism, despite their dwindling numbers now because that system is so austere. As for me, I prefer vegetarian food for health and environmental reasons.

Yousef (signaling the waiter): Please, we'd like to order.

Michael: So Rajiv, you left your religion for which religion, then?

Rajiv: Not for anything, actually. My studies in Germany have widened my scope and given me the freedom to view Hinduism with a critical, doubtful eye. I wasn't convinced of Christianity and so I am closer to atheism.

Michael: I am closer to your view with regards to such a doubt, but I think that human beings need to have a relationship with a god at times, though this relationship should not dominate or control humans.

Yousef: I think that this view needs to be discussed and examined.

Michael: What view do you mean?

Yousef: The idea of atheism and the place of religion or God in human life.

Rajiv: I believe that human progress in science has revealed to man many secrets which have made him feel that there is no need to rely on

metaphysics to explain what is obscure to him. I think that the universe is governed by the laws of science that drives it. It can be said that the universe is a mechanical machine subject to definite inevitable laws, and all that takes place in it has a reason that leads to a specific inevitable result. As long as the mechanical laws are operating the universe according to certain regulations, there is no need for the idea of a god who controls the universe.

Yousef: Science is a great tool in interpreting what surrounds us, but the situation is not so clear cut, for we can't discuss a major issue like this, in fact the biggest issue which has preoccupied human beings since the dawn of history, from only one dimension, even if this dimension appeals to us or is one we trust. There are many dimensions to the subject, including:

Can science explain all the phenomena around us? The answer is of course no - science doesn't have the ability to do that. If we take astronomy for example, theories of astronomy indicate that, even today, we have knowledge of only 5% of the universe, and the rest is dark matter which we do not know anything about. This, of course, solely depends on the ability of the scientists at the present time and what information they have attained; it is very possible that the size of what they do not know could be much larger.

If that is concerning the seen or concrete world, what about that of the unseen?

This makes us wonder: Doesn't science have limits which it cannot pass? We should know that the abilities of science, no matter how powerful they are, are limited and can never be the source that we turn to for the interpretation of everything. The world of the unseen is not within the understanding of science because science is not even able to explain some physical phenomena that happen around us, so how could it explain the world of the unseen, which can neither be subjected to examinations in laboratories nor to ordinary means of perception?

Added to that is the fact that knowing the way something is done should neither lead us to deny its maker nor to belittle the ingenuity involved. If a primitive human sees a TV set and is impressed and puzzled by it, and then later learns its theories and functioning, it should not degrade

the value of this invention or deny that it has a maker. Similarly, if we, for example, were able in biology to decipher the cell, discover the DNA, and uncover all the wonders in it, it doesn't follow that there is no miracle in the DNA, or that this creation has no creator behind it. On the contrary, this overwhelming minute thing, in front of which one stands powerless, unable to reproduce it from scratch, or to interpret how it works, although it is very small, leads one to believe that behind this creation there must be a creator.

Take another example: Professor Cecil Boyce Hamann, a U.S. professor of biology said:

"Where the mysteries of digestion and assimilation were seen as evidence of divine intervention, they now are explained in terms of chemical reactions, each reaction under the control of an enzyme. But, does it rule out the existence of God in His universe? Who determined that these reactions should take place; and that they should be so exactly controlled by the enzymes? One glance at a present-day chart of the various cyclic reactions and their interaction with each other rules out the possibility that this was just a chance relationship that happened to work. Perhaps here, more than any place else, man learns that God uses great principles with which He founded the creation of life."

Michael: But Darwin's theory of evolution confirmed this concept of ours indicating the inevitability of science and revoking the idea of a God that creates - and confirmed that organisms originated under the law of natural selection and evolution, not by being created.

Yousef: This argument leads us to an important question in relation to this or any other theory: Is a scientific explanation absolute and constant in all cases? Many of those who are dazzled by scientific progress have forgotten that one of the characteristics of science is accumulation and being revolutionary. Both form an automatic character of the progress of scientific knowledge, where knowledge and discoveries accumulate until they reach a degree at which they initiate new facts that review the established knowledge, changing the human being's view of this world.

As for Darwin's theory - which in any case is only a scientific hypothesis that did not live up to the level of becoming a scientific fact, let alone a theory - it was only a mere idea about evolution, which clashed with

the discoveries of modern embryology. It also clashed with the results of some excavations which proved the sudden appearance of major groups of animals in a short period of time, which is known as the Cambrian era. This period is often known as the “Cambrian explosion”, rather than a gradual development from one state to another, as the theory of evolution dictates.

Rajiv: So, is it not likely that this world has emerged as a coincidence, without the existence of a maker?

Yousef: Let me clarify the significance of the meaning of coincidence through the use of the principles of mathematics and the laws of coincidence, to learn the probability of the occurrence of a phenomenon coincidently:

If we assume that we have a large box full of thousands of alphabetical letters, the probability of the occurrence of the letter g next to the letter o to form the verb go may be relatively large. However, the likelihood of these letters coming together in a certain order to make a long poem or a creative story is minimal, if not impossible.

Scientists calculated the likelihood of the meeting of atoms that make up one molecule of amino acid (which is the raw material that makes up protein and meat) and found that this needs several billion years to happen. Furthermore, it needs an amount of matter which this vast universe is not wide enough to hold. This is for composing a single minute molecule, so what do you think the case would be if we considered all the living organisms of plants and animals, let alone the formation of life itself and of the whole universe! It is simply impossible to think that this could happen just by sheer coincidence.

All branches of science show that there is an accurate and miraculously precise system and order that controls this universe. The basis of this system has been built on constant universal laws and norms that can’t be changed or altered. Scientists are working hard to detect and understand these laws and norms; and the accuracy of scientific discoveries has reached an extent by which we can predict solar and lunar eclipses and other phenomena hundreds of years before they occur.

Who made these laws and placed them in every single atom of existence, in fact, in all that is even smaller than an atom, at the

beginning of their formation? And who created that system, compatibility and harmony? Who designed so creatively and determined so perfectly? Was all that created without a creator? Or are the people themselves the creators? These are the questions that the holy book of the Muslims, the Qur'an, asks: (Or were they created by nothing, or were they the creators [of themselves]?). Surat At-Tûr (The Mount). 52:35

This system and the law according to which this universe proceeds, and that creativity that we perceive in the universe, wherever we direct our sight, indicates that there is a Mighty, All-Knowing, Fully Aware God who created the universe.

Michael: But here the question arises - though I don't support its content - which is: What do we need religion and a belief in God for? Many people live their lives without a belief in God and without embracing any religion.

Yousef: Anthropological (that is the study of human beings) and theological studies have supported that the need for religion exists in everyone, in all ages and all societies. Man, since ancient times, has been looking for a god to worship and to plead to, and believe that he is strong and is the controller of the universe, creator of all, and eternal.

Human nature proves that man has a biological need that urges him to believe in God each time he experiences any hardship or is threatened by danger, or is about to lose hope.

Moreover, without this belief, man, for the most part, becomes an animal governed by desires, with no conscience to control him.

Rajiv: Allow me Mr. Yousef, I've lived in a country full of different religions, then moved to Europe and came to know followers of other religions and found that followers of each religion have a different perception of God from each other, so how do I interpret this difference? And how do I know the qualities that a true God should have? Also: How do I recognize the true religion from other phony religions?

Yousef: I see the waiter is coming with the food. I promise to discuss these issues in the forthcoming debates, but let's agree first on a quotation by the physicist, Albert Einstein: "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."

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Milestones along the Path

Milestones along the Path

The three friends, Michael, Yousef and Rajiv, met once again at a table in the meeting hall. Each of them ordered his favorite drink, then Rajiv began to speak.

Rajiv: At our last meeting, we stopped the discussion when we were talking about the qualities a true god should have and how to distinguish the true religion from fake ones?

Michael: Let me first establish a fact and then ask a question. Concrete science has achieved tremendous strides in various branches. Medicine has nowadays advanced hundreds of times from the medicine two centuries ago. Communication technology has also made tremendous strides, and we know many concrete facts about chemistry… Curricula that teach these sciences are developing very quickly to keep pace with inventions and new discoveries. It is not possible to find in the field of physical sciences today any scientist who says that the earth is, for instance, not spherical. Philosophy, on the other hand, is still discussing the issues that have been discussed for thousands of years about the existence of God Almighty, and the truth about religions, the system which is most favorable to human life, the meanings of justice, and other concepts and perceptions. If we say that science is evolving and progressing, then why can't we say that religion is evolving as well?

Yousef: For thousands of years, beliefs, perceptions and ideas have been battling and struggling, either directly or indirectly. This means that the human mind in its study of philosophy hasn't reached the level of advancement or taken the great strides that the physical sciences have because our basic human existence, and also the major humanitarian issues that preoccupy man, have not changed. Man is always looking for a comprehensive explanation of life, and on the basis of which he deals with that life... He is looking for an interpretation that brings him closer to his perception of the nature of the greater truths with which he deals, and the nature of relationships and links between these truths, asking what makes us people that have been created, that is creatures that have certain relationships with God and also with others - questions that also existed in bygone days. That is why we can benefit from our ancestors

concerning these issues, just as we benefit from our contemporaries. The topics that used to be discussed are the same topics that are discussed now: topics related to the universe, life and man. And though human beings agree on many of the facts of physical science, they do not agree on most of the facts of subjects related to perceptions and intellectual concepts, a situation that will not end except with the end of mankind.

Michael: So we can say that we will never be able to reach the truth concerning such topics.

Yousef: Who said that? Otherwise, what is the benefit of discussing them? Actually, I think we can discuss these topics by carrying out subtle intellectual debates, while realizing the importance of being impartial and avoiding whims and narrow-mindedness, in order to reach the truth. He who genuinely and sincerely wants to reach the truth , and works to find it, will be guided by God Almighty. A proof of this is that despite these contradictions, there has been progress in these concepts and perceptions in different periods of history at the hands of prophets, reformers and intellectuals, and sometimes even through nations themselves. But what I mean to stress here is that confusion and contradiction are characteristics associated with philosophical or humanitarian issues. It's both an old and new problem.

But let me point out to you two important issues related to that:

The first is that progress in physical science does not necessarily mean progress in thought, perceptions and concepts, for there is no link between the two subjects. A proof of that is the similarity of material progress between, say, the U.S. and Japan, yet the two countries roots in relation to perceptions, concepts, and human and religious thought are different, which means that progression of some human societies in physical sciences does not necessarily mean that it has progressed in its philosophical ideas too.

The second issue is that truth does not gain its soundness and strength from the support or rejection of a group of people, for most humans are in error, in fact human history has recorded instances in which many people agreed on misconceptions or unethical acts, or even heinous crimes.

Rajiv: I agree with you on that, but I think that we are from different cultural

roots, so each of us holds different beliefs and perceptions. Therefore we have to agree first on the grounds or arguments by which we infer the soundness or unsoundness of any particular fact.

Michael: I think that there is no way to do that except through two routes: the mind, or science... This is what we all agree upon.

Yousef: I agree in principle, but which mind do you mean? My mind is different from yours! And which science do you mean? Do you mean only experimental science?

Michael: By mind I mean intellectual axioms that no two people may differ about, or mental evidence that we all agree upon. I think that we don't disagree that we should accept scientific facts that have been proven scientifically. This is, of course, unlike scientific hypotheses, theories or experiments which haven't amounted to facts... Don't you agree with me on that?

Yousef: I agree with you, but I also then wish to bring up another argument, which is as important as these arguments. This is the argument of human nature. And I also wish to bring up another important point concerning the authority of reason and science, which is that there is a difference between what the mind confirms as being a mistake or impossible, and what the mind finds difficult to conceive or perceive.

Rajiv: What do you mean by the argument of human nature?

Yousef: I mean the inner feelings or tendencies which are fundamental in man and which are shared by all human beings. There are natures and properties embedded in all existence, whether inanimate objects, plants, animals or humans. We say, for instance, that water has the characteristic of boiling at a hundred degrees, or that the human body should be at a temperature between 34-42 degrees Celsius to stay alive. These matters just exist in these things without them having any role in their existence.

Michael: You mean the instinct in humans and animals?

Yousef: Instincts exist in humans and animals. They are internal properties that guide them in their life, such as the instinct of predation in beasts. No one embeds in beasts the inclination or the instinct for predation, or the ability for some migratory birds and fish to find their

original habitat, or maternal instinct in females. One who has an instinct might be conscious of the instinct he has, but he doesn't pay attention to how and why he has this instinct.

As for human nature and innate matters, they only exist in man. These are also issues which are inherent in man and not acquired from external factors. He knows and understands them. The difference, however, between human nature and instinct, is that an instinct is related to material matters, while nature is related to matters of humanity, such as love of knowledge, seeking truth, the desire for innovation and creativity, the tendency to like goodness and virtue, and the tendency to like beauty… Man desires these things, and demands them and is attracted to them, without the environment surrounding him playing any part in these feelings, and he doesn›t acquire these matters from his upbringing or social background either. Natural matters are implanted in a human and stems from inside him, like animal instincts, but they are related to abstract moral matters. This nature in man is that which makes him attracted to what is nice and repelled by what is ugly. You don›t find a human with a sound nature shunning away from a nice smell or a beautiful view, while being attracted by a bad smell or a disgusting scene.

Rajiv: But how do we define these natural matters in a way which allows us to decide whether they are natural or unnatural?

Yousef: Natural matters in humans are characterized by several traits, the most important of which are:

That they are comprehensive and general for everyone.

That they extend in time, in the sense that they don't require something in one time and require something else in another time.

They come from the innermost core of a human and his soul, and do not come from education or by acquisition, though education might strengthen and develop them.

They do not submit to the influence of ambient factors, but may be affected in certain circumstances by some factors. The purity of innate matters may change and its nature may become corrupted, similar to what happens to the human senses of hearing, sight and taste when

affected by a disease, but generally they are not erased; they may weaken or fade, but not become completely canceled or removed.

Michael: I think that we agree on what was put forth, but because of this last point, I'm a bit skeptical of using human nature as one means of inference in our subject.

Rajiv: We can discuss the matter that depends on the issue of human nature at its due time. If all of us accept it, we will agree on it, but if we don't accept that issue, we'll search for another argument.

Yousef: By the way, I would like to turn your attention after our agreement to these means of inference; that some who don't know Islam might think that our agreement on these means do not agree with the religion of Islam, which is wrong.

Michael: What I know is that religion is based on the belief in a sacred text, and blind acceptance of certain issues that should not be discussed or doubted. For that reason, great battles took place in European history after scientific discoveries were found, since the church fought these discoveries and opposed any form of thinking that doid not refer to the Bible.

Yousef: What you say is true with some reservation, but it does not apply to Islam. It is true that religion is based on believing in a sacred text and absolute recognition of the soundness of certain issues, yet Islam has made the mind, thought and knowledge emanate from reflection, exploration, and experiment on the self and creation at large, which is the path to belief in God Almighty, the holy book of the Muslims, the Qur'an, and the Prophet Muhammad. Never in the history of Islam did this contradiction and conflict you're talking about between religion and science or reason arise.

Rajiv: It is very impressive that your holy book urges people to respect the mind, and also contemplation and knowledge.

Michael: I see that those in charge of the hall are indicating that it's near closing time. Let's stop at this point and complete tomorrow.

Rajiv: I'm busy tomorrow. But it would be my pleasure if you accept my invitation for a trip on the banks of the River Seine the day after tomorrow.

Michael and Yousef: Good, with pleasure.

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Know your God!!

Know your God!!

On a clear and sunny afternoon, the three friends met, as they had previously agreed, on the banks of the Seine. Rajiv had invited his two friends to take a trip on board a river steamer. The three friends stood enjoying the magnificent views of the river and greenery surrounding its banks. Yousef addressed his friends, gazing into the horizon.

Yousef: Rivers, seas, plants, animals, mountains and man, and all that we see in this world, in fact all that we don't see too, are clear indications that there is a supreme wisdom that made these things come to life. It shows that this world indeed has a Creator and a Lord… Don't you agree with me on that?

Rajiv: Yes, but we have already agreed in the meeting before the last that this world has a Creator. However, there are some issues relating to this conviction which are worthy of discussion.

Michael: I think that the most important issue to start off with is that which has already been mentioned by you, Rajiv, about the question related to the qualities by which a true God should be characterized.

Yousef: What we live amongst and glimpse at of the magnificence of the creation of the universe, is closely related with what you are asking, since the origin of belief and certainty that God is the Truth is to have "a sound perception" of this universe, including the self that is within you, by knowing its elements, structures and aims of the creation of every creature in it.

Michael: We have recognized the existence of a God, the Creator of the universe. Perception of this God, however, is different in different religions. In fact, these perceptions are so different and contrasting that it drives some people to quit researching in this subject and to live a life closer to atheism, even if they do not explicitly recognize this.

Yousef: You are right my friend, but allow me to add that this doesn't stop them from feeling that they need to worship some god. In fact, when some deny the existence of God, they are but deifying themselves. They make gods out of their own desires. Some of the most obstinate atheists escaped from acknowledging the existence of God and believing in Him

by taking other things which they gave the same greatness and qualities that should be given only to the true God, without any justification except to escape from a deviant perception of what is divine.

Rajiv: If we consider our subject, we can say that God must be awed, loved and feared, all at the same time. One must feel the need for Him. This is from the side of human beings. However, these qualities, in fact, represent a condition of man that may be realized by more than one person towards more than one god. Then, let's review the characteristics of the true God, which should be agreed upon by all humans.

Yousef: What you've said is beautiful and correct, and is connected to the subject we've started, for through our recognition of the inevitability of the existence of God, and our agreement that this magnificent harmonious universe has a Creator, who has predestined the existence of this universe and then created it out of nothing, we deduct that this Creator is the one who we describe as the Lord. That the Lord - who is our Creator and the Creator of all things – is in fact the God who deserves deification and worship, and none else should be worshiped but Him, that is, as you've just said, no one should direct his absolute awe, love, fear and hope except to Him. Hence, we can perceive the qualities of this true God.

Rajiv: If we acknowledge what you said, I can say that the first self-evident qualities are that this God is present and alive, and that this Lord God must be a Creator.

Yousef: That's right and this also evidently requires that neither this God nor any of His attributes are created. A Creator can't be created, because if He were a creature, it would have necessitated that He would be like us: He would have a Creator. Therefore, He wouldn't be God and shouldn't be worshipped - and for this same reason, none of the creatures should be.

Michael: It is then necessary to define the meaning of the Creator.

Yousef: In short, I can say that the Creator is the inventor of things for which there is no earlier example or model, i.e. He created everything from scratch, and He is also able to bring everything into existence out of nowhere and nothing. He predestines the existence of these creatures

and structures, a predestination that is ordained by wisdom, i.e. not by absurdity or incidentally.

But a necessary characteristic of a creature is that it never existed before it was created, i.e. it must have a beginning. It must also wear out and perish, i.e. it must have an end. It also has limited capacities and capabilities, and always needs others.

Rajiv: If this Lord God is the Creator, it is only natural that He is the Owner of what He creates.

And if we say that all that is in the heavens and on the earth belongs to God and all are His creation, then He has to know all about them, because if anything about them is hidden from Him, it follows that any servant - in such a situation of God not knowing about his state – would be independent of his Creator. What also points to God's knowledge is the perfection and accuracy that we see in the creatures. This can never happen except if the Creator has absolute knowledge.

Yousef: What follows from ownership is the ability to do what one wants with the heavens and the earth and all that is in between them, and due to this and His knowledge, He has the right to manage and lay down laws and regulations for all things.

Michael: But I, too, own things, and I also know a lot. Does that indicate that I have divine attributes? I do not think that is true!

Yousef: Your observation is important, my friend. I see that continuing talking about the qualities in this way will take a while, although it is important. So we can reach a general rule that we can make as a standard for these qualities, and through this we can - to a large extent – deduct all the qualities. Allow me to introduce the features of this rule which, as far as I understand, are based on my Islamic culture.

Michael and Rajiv: Please do.

Yousef: This rule can be summarized as follows:

First, qualities of the self can be divided generally into two categories: qualities of imperfection and those of perfection.

Perfection is to be characterized by good qualities and not being described by the opposite negative characteristics .

Imperfection is to be characterized by negative qualities and not being described by the opposite positive characteristics

It follows then that in order for the denial of having any negative quality to be complete, one must be characterized by the opposite of that quality, i.e. by the quality of perfection; otherwise the negation would be imperfect, since just lacking a quality is in itself imperfect and deficient, and not enough to be characterized by perfection.

The second is that whatever the creature disdains, can't be attributed to the Creator, for all the qualities that it disdains is characterized by and described as being ill-favored; thus it mustn't be attributed to the Exalted, Almighty Lord. Such qualities of imperfection should never be from among His attributes, because God is the Most Perfect, from all aspects.

The third point is that there should be a complete separation between the Creator and the created. There is nothing like the Creator...As for the qualities that are known to be attributed to both the Creator and the created, such as ownership, knowledge, compassion and love, there is no similarity between them in the true sense, because the qualities of the Creator are different from those of the created. Qualities of the created are usually not free from imperfection, from personal interests, and from weaknesses.

Michael: I wish you would illustrate what you say and give examples.

Rajiv: And I wish you would explain them, coupled with the points you mentioned, and that these examples be drawn from what we previously spoke about, or be real life examples.

Yousef: Well, the first point is that all rational people agree that being weak is a quality of imperfection. Similarly, being in need of other people, or things, is also a quality of imperfection. It follows then that it is not right to attribute these two qualities to the true God. Rather, He should be exalted from both qualities and must have, at the same time, the opposite of these two qualities, which are the qualities of perfection of strength, and being free of need. Our Qur'an, therefore, denies the divinity of Christ and his mother (peace be upon them) in just a few words that hit the heart of the matter. Allah says describing this noble prophet and his mother: (they both used to eat food). He who needs to eat food does so when he feels hungry, and this is a quality of imperfection and weakness.

Moreover, he who eats food is - like all human beings - in need of this food, so neither of them can be a god, because they do not possess the qualities of the true God.

And another detail is having children. The true God is exalted over the imperfection of being similar to creatures. Humans need children to be remembered, helped and for inheritance, or such like reasons. These are all qualities of imperfection and should never be attributed to the true God.

The second point is that all men of reason shun from being, for example, described with the quality of inefficiency. It is then more of a reason not to give such a quality to the true God. Rather, He should be characterized by the opposite quality of perfection, which is the quality of (efficiency). And so when Christ was unable to ward off from himself the harm he suffered by his enemies, or when idols or animals taken as gods by some people aren't able to ward off harm from themselves, then they are even more inefficient in warding off harm from their worshippers and lovers. This is a natural deduction and therefore someone who is inefficient, can't be fit to be a true god that is worshipped.

And men of reason shun from being described, for example, as being unjust. It therefore follows that a true god is never unjust and that He is The Most Just… and so on and so forth… Each negation of an imperfection should correspond with the confirmation of the opposite of the negated quality.

Finally, the third point. Let's use the quality of knowledge, as it's a good quality. Its negative opposite is ignorance. Perfection is being characterized by having knowledge and by being free from ignorance. Imperfection is being characterized by ignorance and by lacking knowledge. God's quality of knowledge is absolutely perfect , because He is characterized by absolute knowledge and is absolutely free from ignorance.

As for humans, their quality of knowledge is only relatively perfect , because they are characterized by knowledge in some issues, while at the same time characterized by ignorance in other matters. Their perfection is only relative. And so on for the remaining qualities.

Michael: It feels like it's getting colder, especially since it's becoming dark. I think that's enough for tonight.

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A Light from Heaven (Mankind's need for the message)

A Light from Heaven (Mankind's need for the message)

When Yousef entered the meeting hall in the youth hostel where they were staying, he found Michael sitting at a table with his eyes staring at the hall ceiling, as if deeply contemplating the chandelier hanging from it. Yousef went towards Michael and greeted him, but Michael did not notice him. Yousef pulled up the chair opposite him and said:

Yousef: You seem concerned about something important. Care to share?

Michael (Preoccupied): Oh … Sorry, hello, I did not notice you.

Hasn't Rajiv arrived yet?

Yousef: Actually, I'm five minutes early,

but here he is coming towards us.

Rajiv: Greetings my friends. I have been so looking forward to meeting you.

Yousef: So are we…

Michael: I must just say that I'm very happy about these fruitful dialogues, and have been pondering deeply before both of you came about an important matter that I'd like to share with you. Our previous conversation left me overwhelmed, contemplating that if the One who created us is the One we should worship, then is it reasonable that He would leave us without sending us any message or any means of knowing Him? Is it reasonable to leave us alone just like that?

Rajiv: How coincidental! I was thinking about this very point just before coming.

Yousef: That's a very good question, and it's in its place. God is the One who created human beings in the best stature, and made all that's

on earth subservient to them, and sent down from heaven blessings, though they do not deserve any. And it is not reasonable that He created this universe and human beings, and provided these blessings in vain or without purpose.

Michael: (Relieved) It is very good that we touch on this point, because I want to know what is the real purpose and goal for which God created the universe and human beings, and sent His blessings unto them?

Rajiv: I expect that this will be linked to the characteristics of the true God that we have mentioned in the previous dialogue, since the Lord was present before the existence of the creation; however I can't deduce the exact relationship.

Yousef: What you are saying is correct Rajiv. I will try to make the matter more specific and clear, and more understandable with this example: When you love something, it is natural that you would like to actually achieve it. Is that not so?

Rajiv: Yes.

Yousef: So, what stops you from actually achieving it?

Rajiv: The cause that comes to my mind now is that I am not capable of achieving it.

Yousef: So when you have the ability you'll be able to achieve your goal. And this is the case here.

Michael (Frowning): Your example has made me even more baffled and confused!

Yousef: Okay, and for that I apologize, but just bear with me for a while. We have agreed in our last discussion that the qualities and attributes the Lord Almighty has are the best and most beautiful. They are loved by both God and His creatures, and some of these qualities are that He is the Creator, The All-Capable and the Sovereign King. And the love of

these qualities requires that one will act as they dictate and implement them. So since God is All-Capable and nothing can prevent Him from carrying out His will, He created the creation to make manifest one of His beloved attributes, as because He is a Creator, He loves to create. And because He is a Benefactor He loves to give, because He is the Most Merciful, He loves to be merciful and because He is All-capable, nothing can prevent him from doing what He wants and wills.

Michael: So what is our place in this order?!

Yousef: Our position is that God created us to know Him and to declare that He is too great to have any imperfections and defects. He grants us blessings not only to enjoy them, but also to thank Him for them and not to waste them; He, the Almighty, loves us to thank and praise Him, and this requires us to be submissive to Him and show loving servitude to Him alone, for He alone is the Benefactor, The Creator and worthy of worship.

Rajiv: There are two points raised by what you've just said. The first being, does that mean that one must remain in the temple to achieve what you say?

Yousef: No, no, I didn't mean that at all. This sense of servitude to God is a lost cause and is not recognized by Islam, the religion I follow, for servitude to God covers all the activities of life, including construction of the earth and the establishment of human civilization.

Michael: But we construct on the earth and establish our contemporary civilization without referring to religion.

Yousef: For that reason, we find the manifestations of human misery as a result of this civilization; such as the spread of anxiety and suicide, homosexuality, and social disruption, and the injustice of man towards his fellow men, especially when he feels that he will not be held accountable for anything. When a civilization is in such a form, it is closer to being just a secular life, that is a system that is interested in things and inventions and their development, while it lacks the human dimension. But if we take this dimension into account, we cannot but notice the components

of man, on top of which comes the spiritual component. When civilization and human activity is linked with the Creator of humans, then all its aspects are consistent with the humanity of man, in fact with the whole of humanity and with the whole universe, simply because He who created this man and who created this universe knows most what suits them best and what doesn't.

Michael: Does this mean that in order for, say, Rajiv to perfect his work, he has to refer to books of religion? How can this be?! Then if we accept what you've said, how do we arrive at what God wants from us to lead upright lives?

Yousef: What I've said doesn't mean that religion is involved in technical matters of science and mundane activities, but it lays the framework and ethical rules for the activities of life, and the systems for different aspects of life. Religion also regulates relationships among humans, between one and his society, and also among societies. In addition to that, religion defines for man his place in this universe, and his relationship with his Lord.

Let me give you two examples, for clarification. God created us and created earth and everything on it. He brings forth food from the earth for us due to the rain He sends down from the sky, and He also brings forth medicine and deadly poisons. He granted us with an intellect, so as to be able to distinguish what is harmful from what isn't. He gave us the ability to experiment in order to discover these plants and make use of them, extracting drugs and medicines from them. Then He laid down for us a general rule in His religion, which is that everything that harms us or harms others is prohibited.

Another example is that all human beings agree on the good of justice and the abhorrence of injustice, but when you enter into the details of this justice, you find many differences. This is because minds differ with regards to their purposes and objectives, and also each group has conflicting interests. We, therefore, need the source of Justice to be Him who has authority higher than all human beings, One in front of whom all human beings are equal, and in front of whom no party will win because

of favoritism, or personal interests and benefits.

As for how to get to know what God wants from us; this is also linked to the attributes of God, as He, the Almighty, is the Sovereign King and the Wise One, and it is linked to what we have already mentioned in the beginning of this dialogue, that God created the universe out of wisdom and not in vain. Do you think that it is wise that a company, for instance, establishes and builds its facilities, employs its workers and staff, runs its machines and markets its products without any operation or management systems and regulations?!

Michael: Of course not.

Yousef: What do you think would happen if this was how this universe and creation operates?! It is for that reason, therefore, that God sent down His books and covenant to act as guidance for humans, leading to their welfare in religion and worldly affairs, by means of ambassadors between Him and His slaves. These ambassadors are His messengers, may the mercy and blessing of God be upon them all, who are intermediaries between God and His creation, relaying His commands and prohibitions, in order to let people know their Lord, and to guide them to the meaning of justice and the harms of injustice. They explain to people what is of benefit to them and what is harmful for them in this world and the Hereafter.

Humans are in utmost need of the message, because all his actions are performed for one of two reasons: one to bring what benefits them and another to ward off what harms them. The message is the light that shows man what will benefit him and what will harm him. It is the light of God on His land, and His justice among His slaves.

The objective of the message is not sensory discrimination between what is beneficial and what is harmful, for this is something that animals can do. The donkey, for example, can differentiate and distinguish between barley and dust. What is meant by the message is to distinguish between acts that harm the doer in this world and the Hereafter, and acts that will benefit him in this world and the Hereafter. If it wasn't for that message, minds wouldn't have been guided to the details of benefits and

detriments of life.

Rajiv: The second point is that we see people vary in their attitude towards the Lord and their submission to Him. How then are they equal in their enjoyment of His blessings?

Yousef: This is the wisdom of trials and tests, to make clear their attitude towards their Lord. However, they definitely aren't equal in their rewards and final abode. This reward is based on the messages of the apostles which serve as regulations and the covenant that should be referred to.

Michael: I have a third point to add, which is: how do all human beings enjoy God's blessings, while from among them you find the deceptive, the liar and the unjust, and some of them might even escape from the punishment of the society, and the law may not be applied on him?!

Yousef: This is also the wisdom of trials and tests. But these people, if they escape punishment and the community's application of justice on them, they definitely do not escape from the application of divine justice on them. This is one of the wisdoms of the resurrection and reckoning after death on the Last Day, that is the Day of Judgment. On that day God will grant rewards to people for their good deeds, or will punish them for their evil actions towards their Lord, towards themselves and towards others. On that day, there will be the true judgment between adversaries.

But there must be a reference on which people can depend. It must be known to them and available for them to refer to. Here also comes the role of the messages of God's messengers, who describe to people the basis on which they will be held accountable, and describe to them what will happen to them if they adhere to, or violate this basis. These messengers also describe what the Afterlife will be like; blissful or painful, full of reward or punishment, and what will occur on the Day of Judgment.

Rajiv: Mr. Yousef, do you remember that we said that we need to discuss the qualities of the true religion?

Yousef: Yes, I remember that.

Rajiv: I think it is time to open this file.

Michael: You are right, Rajiv. I suggest that we devote our next discussion to that very subject.

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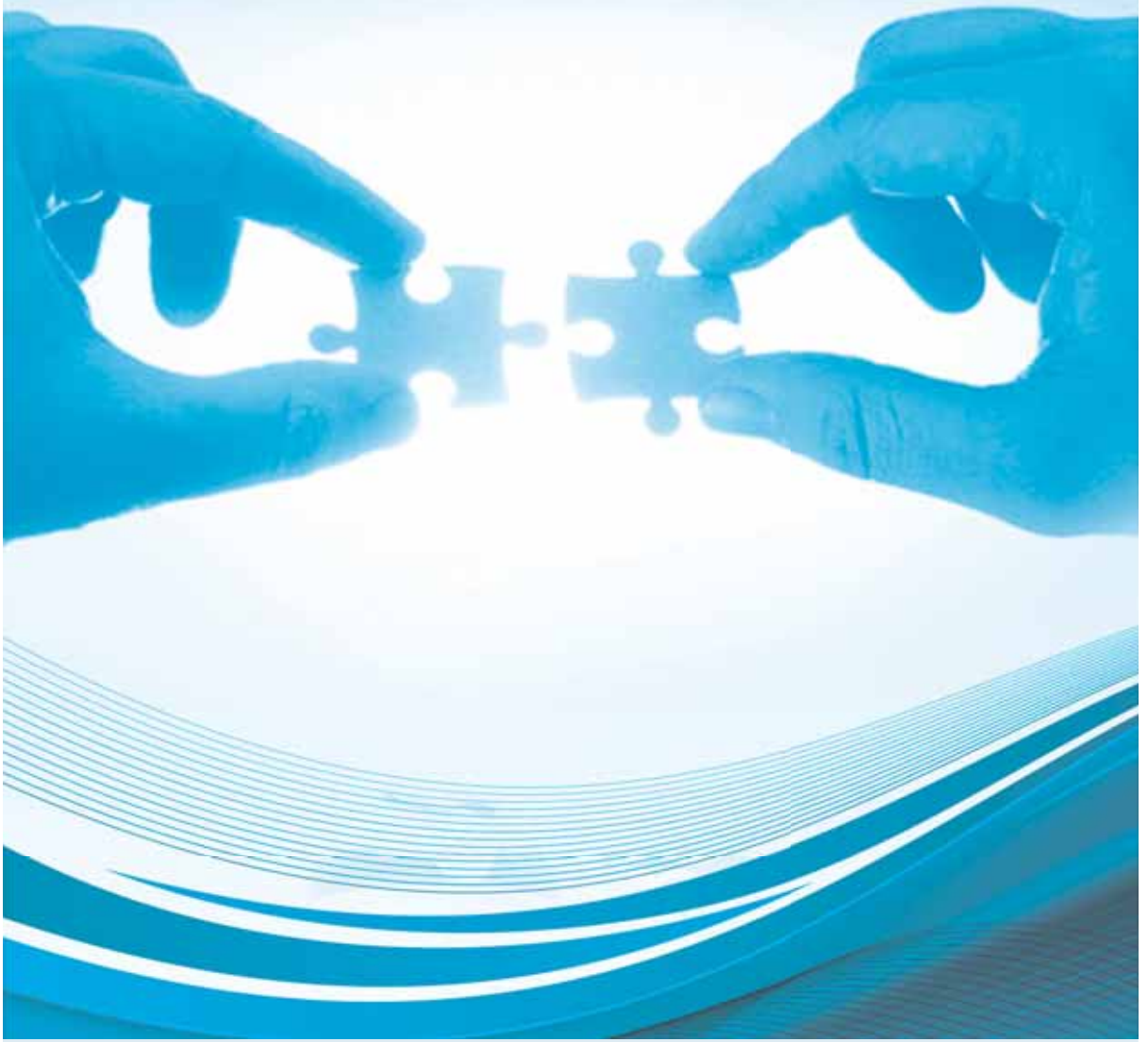
Components of the True Religion



Components of the True Religion

Yousef met up with his two friends in front of the entrance to the Louvre, as was agreed.

Yousef: I have chosen this place especially in order to invite you to join me on a tour of the museum, as I hope to recall a part of human history before we start our conversation on today's subject. What do you think about this idea? If you gentleman don't think it's a good idea, we can always change course.

Michael: Really, Yousef! How strange for you to ask us what we think after we have already gathered here! In that case don't you think it would have been better for you to consult with us first, before we came? Anyway… I don't mind taking the tour ... What about you, Rajiv?

Rajiv: I also don't have any problem with the tour, but I think that we must be quick if we still want to discuss our topic as planned. The Louvre is large and it will take us a considerable amount of time and energy to give our full attention to it.

Yousef: My friends, I apologize for this mistake; I only intended to make it a surprise, but now I see that I might have been over zealous.

Michael: Don't worry, now we must just make haste, for the full length of the museum halls is approximately 13 square kilometers, and it has more than a million pieces to look at.

Yousef: Actually, I did not intend to explore the entire Louvre, I just wanted it to provide us with some information on the subject we'll be discussing. I suspect that we'll focus our attention on the archaeological collections of ancient civilizations, most of which are located on the ground and first floors.

After about two hours, the trio left the museum. They appeared to be very fatigued by the tour.

Yousef: Why don't we have a rest and order some lunch at a nearby restaurant which I found on the Internet?

And while they were walking towards the restaurant, Yousef resumed what he was saying.

Yousef: Didn't you notice that much of what we saw from the possessions of different civilizations had mostly to do with religion, in one way or another? Doesn't that indicate the place of religion for humans, whatever history they have, or wherever they come from?

Rajiv: What you're saying is taken for granted with regards to anthropologists. In their research in human history and its effects, they found that although there may be civilizations with neither factories, palaces, sciences or philosophies, they have yet to find any civilization without temples.

Michael: The fact here is that any sane person would think that religion is not evil, but rather a core civilization component of human existence. But the problem is that the followers of one religion believe that it is the only true religion and call people to it. All those who follow a certain doctrine call people to follow that doctrine, and to glorify their leader. Followers of each faith believe that their religion is the true one, and one falls in a quandary: Is Judaism the true religion, or is it Christianity, Buddhism, or Islam? How does one exactly find out which of these is on the right path? Or should we say they are all on the right path, as long as what they are satisfies the need for religion?! Puzzling, isn't it?

Yousef: Yes, confusing, but with some thinking and insight we can quite easily find our way out of this confusion. We don't, even though we are hungry, just accept to devour any food, that is, food not fit for human consumption. We don't accept to fill our bellies with any food just to satisfy our hunger. So how much more do we need to think before satisfying our spiritual instinct too. We must pick the right food for it.

It's impossible that everyone has the truth on their sides, because there is only one truth in this regard. Therefore, it's impossible that all these religions and human faiths come from God and that all can be the truth. If there are several - and the truth belongs to one – the question remains unchanged: Which is the true religion? There must be, then, some criteria by which we can define the true religion from the false one. If we find that these criteria apply to a certain religion, we will know it's the true one. And if there is any problem with these criteria or one of them with regards to any religion, we will know the religion is false.

Rajiv: But you mentioned now, in the context of what you've just said, the first criterion, which is that this religion must be from God. Is it necessary for the religion to be heavenly? On earth there are man-made religions that millions of people follow, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism and others.

Yousef: This is self-evident because the basis of any religion is the worship of God or gods!! If we really acknowledge that the Lord alone created the universe and human beings, and He alone made all that is on earth subservient to them and blessed them with it; we must acknowledge that He alone is worthy of worship and that He alone should be worshipped and has no partner; for how can it be possible that He creates and grants alone, and some other beings are thanked and worshipped?! Furthermore, it is essential that the true religion calls for the worship of the Lord alone, and proves that He alone has the qualities of the true God, and also reveres His messengers and respects them.

We have agreed, in the last meeting, that the qualities of the true God and mankind's need require that there be some guide to direct human beings and organize their lives and achieve happiness. This guide is nothing but religion, which is approved by Him who knows His creation.

We also agreed that it is necessary to have a Judgment Day in which humans will be held accountable for their actions and in which all injustices will be repaid. If God alone is the One who condemns and reckons His creatures on the Day of Resurrection, it then follows that that reckoning must be according to the religion that He revealed to them. Accordingly, any religion that is brought by anybody and he attributes it to himself is inevitably false.

But I would like to point out the fact here that most of the followers of religions, when you ask them for evidence to prove what they believe, they argue that they found their fathers following this religion and behaving in this way, and then they mention unauthenticated stories and events and rely on written legacies, although it is not known who said or who wrote such material. They do not even know in which language it was first written, or in which country it was found, for that matter. These were merely an unorganized mixture, collected, then glorified, then inherited through generations without being scientifically verified. This is exactly

what we must avoid, and here it is clear that from the most important components of the true religion is to prove its link to its source, and the soundness of the arguments of the apostle conveying the religion from God.

Rajiv: O.k. Then we have to start from the set of foundations upon which we've agreed, whether concerning suitable methods of verification: mind, science, and human nature, or with the facts that we've already agreed upon; such as the existence of God and qualities of the true God, and the rationale for the people's need for the message.

Michael: If we agree on that, then the next quality, after the fact that religion is from God, and that God alone should be worshipped, would be that religion reveres science and doesn't oppose it, and is in conformity with the sound mind. If we say that true religion is the religion of God, and the sound mind is God's creation, then it is impossible that the religion of God contradicts His creation.

Yousef: I agree with that, with an emphasis on two things:

The first is that issue that we've already accepted: that there is a difference between matters whose occurrence and validation the mind asserts to be impossible, and matters that are difficult for the mind to envision. There's a topic in religion that's difficult for the mind to imagine or be convinced of, which is the topic of the unseen. For example: the existence of angels and demons, and how God sends revelation to the human prophet, and the details of the Day of Judgment. But these issues are different from what the mind asserts to be impossible.

For example, a hundred years ago it was difficult for the mind to believe that man would be able to go up into space, send a spacecraft to the moon, or hear and see someone else thousands of kilometers away. But there was nothing in the mind which said that if a matter is difficult to believe, it is then impossible. If we, however, say that the human being himself is in two different places at the same time, or that 1 +1 +1 = 1, the mind will judge that it is impossible.

The second thing, building on the previous point, is that some of the details of the religion may not appear to be reasonably explained, although they don't contradict with our minds. Here we must recognize

them as long as we have established our faith on a sound basis of argumentation. If you realize by your mind that someone is one hundred percent trustworthy and that there is no doubt in your trust in him, and then that person wants to test your trust so he asks you to “sign on these blank papers”. You will sign these papers without questioning, for example. If, however, your trust in him is not complete, you would inquire about these papers. Similarly, (faith or belief) is building trust in God through the mind and thought, and (details of the religion) is the proof that you present to illustrate your trust in God.

Michael: So, one of the components that makes up the true religion is that its parts don’t contradict with or differ from its other parts. It shouldn’t command something and then overrule it by something else. It shouldn’t forbid something then allow its equivalent without a reason. It shouldn’t forbid an issue or permit it for a group and then permit it or forbid it for another.

Rajiv: If we say that this religion is like a guide for humanity to what their Creator wants from them, then this religion must include guidance concerning the way of worship, and teach man the reason why God created him in the first place, as well as detailing the system that should be followed by man. This religion should also hold an answer to all major questions of life and teach us where man came from and where he is destined to go to. Moreover, this religion should achieve security and peace of mind for the soul, and be consistent with normal human nature.

Michael: I think it is important that religion calls to do good and forbids evil characters and deeds, and that it is a mercy for creation, protecting them from being unjust to themselves and from being unjust to others, whether through violating rights, or having excessive control over wealth, or by leaders misguiding those they are leading.

Yousef: There is an important prerequisite which has been forgotten. Religion must combine all these qualities, without any exception.

Michael: I would like you talk to us about your religion in some detail, Yousef. I’ve come to realize that my information about it is little, and perhaps even distorted.

Yousef: I promise to do that in our next meeting.

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The Greatest Human Being

The Greatest Human Being

Yousef walked vigorously and actively toward his two friends carrying a book and a bag containing his laptop under his arm. Once he approached them, he promptly greeted them. He didn't even wait for their reply to open the conversation.

Yousef: Today I shall begin by responding to your request, Michael, and explain to you the most important features that are unique to Islam. It is indisputable that this is the belief in the Messenger of Islam, Muhammad (the highest degree of mercy and blessings of God be upon him). I've also brought a book to show you, written by a Westernized thinker, in which he mentions Muhammad. Listen to what he says…

Michael: (Abruptly interrupts Yousef) …Wait a second dear Yousef…I thought that the most important characteristic of Islam was its perception of God.

Yousef: That's true, on the whole, but I've overlooked that for some very important reasons, including:

That Islam, as the message conveyed by Prophet Muhammad, does not claim that this perception of divinity is a novelty that was started by him, but rather, it is the religion of all the prophets and messengers, from Adam to Christ, down to Muhammad (may the mercy and blessings of God be upon them all). Islam is the origin of the religion of all human beings, but humanity deviated from this religion and distorted it. Islam came to bring back the correct faith in God and call people to return to monotheism and to worship God alone, and not to ascribe any partners to Him. Belief in God and monotheism in Islam is a renewing episode in a series extending throughout history that began with the creation of man himself, and will not end until the world ceases to exist. It's a religion founded even before the Prophet of Islam was born.

The second thing is that I thought that what we had agreed upon in our previous meetings is enough to overlook this point.

Rajiv: Do you mean that Islam achieves the qualities of the true God that we talked about?

Yousef: Yes, that's right!

Rajiv: So, why don't you explain to us in short Islam's perception of divinity, before we move on to what you would like to present.

Yousef: Well...in Islam, the belief is that one God created man and all these worlds out of nothing, and that there is nothing like Him in these worlds. He is the One who originated and laid the laws of the universe which we call "the laws of nature", and created everything in this existence with a due measure and according to certain laws. He is the Supreme, the Greatest, and the Most High.

There is nothing like Him, neither in His Self, Attributes nor in His Deeds. He is absolutely perfect and does not lack any thing in any aspect. He neither begets, nor is he begotten, and He has neither an equivalent nor a peer. He Alone gives life and causes death. He does not become incarnate in any of His creatures, nor do any of his creatures become incarnate in him.

He is the only Lord God and therefore He alone should be worshiped. No partner should be ascribed unto Him in His Kingdom and He has neither a peer, nor a vizier, nor a counselor who is worshiped with him. There is no mediator that can either bring us closer to Him or intercede with Him without His permission to do so. Worship is exclusively to Him alone, in all its different manifestations.

Michael: That book that you brought with you, what is it about

Yousef: It's about timeless personalities in human history. The author is Dr. Michael Hart, a mathematician- astronomer who worked at NASA.

Michael: So what does he have to do with historical studies?

Yousef: He considered the study of history as a hobby. He noted that among the tens of thousands of millions of people, encyclopedias did

not mention except twenty thousand persons. He set several bases for the selection of the greatest figures of timeless personalities from among these. The most important of these principles is that the personality had to be a real person, not mythical or unknown, he/she should have also made a deep impact, good or bad, which should be global and extend across the history of mankind. I feel that these form an excellent foundation for our topic.

Rajiv: So who is the greatest timeless personality in the eyes of this author then?!

Yousef: He put Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, at the top of the list of the hundred timeless personalities he had chosen. There were reasons for this choice, which he clarified...

Yousef opens the book and reads:

" My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels.

Of humble origins, Muhammad founded and promulgated one of the world's greatest religions, and became an immensely effective political leader. Today, thirteen centuries after his death, his influence is still powerful and pervasive."

Then he says: "... Since there are roughly twice as many Christians as Moslems in the world, it may initially seem strange that Muhammad has been ranked higher than Jesus." And it may seem strange to you that Muhammad is number one on this list, while Jesus number three and Moses sixteen, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon them all.

"There are two principal reasons for that decision. First, Muhammad played a far more important and greater role in the development of Islam (and in reinforcing and establishing it) than Jesus did in the development of Christianity. Although Jesus was responsible for the main ethical and moral precepts of Christianity, St. Paul was the main developer of the

Christian theology, its principal proselytizer and the author of a large portion of the New Testament.

Muhammad, however, was responsible for both the theology of Islam and its main ethical and moral principles. In addition, he played the key role in proselytizing the new faith, and in establishing the religious practices of Islam (the rules of Islam, the fundamentals of law and social behavior, and the moral foundation and transactions between people in their religious and secular life). Moreover, he is the author of the Moslem holy scriptures, the Koran, a collection of certain of Muhammad's insights that he believed had been directly revealed to him by Allah.. Since the Koran is at least as important to Moslems as the Bible is to Christians, the influence of Muhammed through the medium of the Koran has been enormous (it is in this book that Muslims find all they need in this world and the Hereafter). " Are you surprised by this?!

Rajiv: These are words that really deserve attention, but please allow me to say that this writer wasn't a specialist in humanities.

Yousef: Even if he wasn't, his words are persuasive and are based on objective grounds, and there is no suspicion that he may be biased to Muhammad, as Hart is a Jew. If you need testimonies from other sources, let me mention some of them to you...

Yousef then took out his laptop and started reading from some of his document files.

Yousef: See, sir:

The French poet Lamartine says: "Who would dare to compare any great man in modern history with Muhammad?! As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may ask, is there any greater man than he? Never has a man set for himself, voluntarily or involuntarily, a more sublime aim, since this aim was superhuman: to subvert superstitions which had been interposed between man and his Creator."

The greatest of German poets, Goethe said: “I’ve searched through history to find a top example of a human being and I concluded that he is the Arab Prophet Muhammad.”

According to the world-renowned Russian writer and philosopher, Leo Tolstoy: “I am one of those who are very much impressed by the Prophet Muhammad who was chosen by God to receive His last revelation through his soul, heart and mind. He chose him to be the last prophet; hence, no other prophets would come after him.”

The Irish writer and thinker, the most famous rejecter of the Nobel Prize in literature, George Bernard Shaw, said: “The world is in dire need of a man with the mind of Muhammad… after looking into the story of this man I found it to be an amazing and miraculous one, and I came to the conclusion that he was never an enemy of Christianity, and must be called instead the savior of humanity. In my opinion, if he was to be given control over the world today, he would solve our problems and secure the peace and happiness which the world is longing for.”

Michael: All of what you’ve just mentioned is about the greatness of Muhammad, but what proves that Muhammad is really a messenger of God?

Yousef: Listen, my dear friend, to what the Swiss theologian, Dr. Hans Küng said: “Muhammad is a prophet in the true sense of the word. We can no longer deny that Muhammad is the guiding leader to the path of salvation.”

There is also ample evidence to prove that Muhammad is definitely a messenger of God.

Michael: If you have them, then please present them to us, or at least some of them.

Yousef continues to browse through some of his files on his computer, and then says:

From the evidence that the Prophet (mercy and blessing of God be upon him) is a true prophet is that the heavenly books gave glad tidings of his coming. In the Torah, in Deuteronomy 18, paragraphs 18-19, the Lord says to Moses, " I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him." It is common knowledge that the brothers of the children of Israel are the sons of Ishmael (the Arabs), and the similarities between Moses and Muhammad are more than any other apostle, and the words "and will put my words in his mouth" is a reference to the illiterate Prophet Muhammad.

In John16, paragraph 7-8: Jesus said to the disciples "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the comforter (or the Spirit of Truth, PERIQLYTOS) will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and judgment..." And the origin of the word "the Spirit of Truth" is the Greek word "PERIQLYTOS", which linguistically refers to a high level of praise, that is the word "Ahmed or Al-Hamed" or "praiseworthy", and this is the meaning of the name of Prophet Muhammad in Arabic.

Further evidence is that he used to tell us news of the unseen. In fact he used to give an accurate description of some matters of the unseen, and he used to inform us about future events. And there are the scientific miracles of his message, and the legislative perfection of that message...

Michael: Where? Where is all that? Show us examples of it.

Yousef: There are many in the Qur'an, the book which was revealed to Muhammad, and the great miracle for mankind.

Rajiv: So then it is important to learn about this Qur'an. Through it we will know the extent of the truth of your messenger, and know the foundations of this religion.

Yousef: That's right, and this is what I suggest that we postpone to the next meeting.

Michael: Before we leave, I would like to know: Where can I acquire this book that you have?

Yousef: This particular book has been with me for a long time now, but I saw a modern edition of it in a bookshop close to the hostel. We can pay it a visit before our next meeting.

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The Last Message

The Last Message

The trio met in front of the entrance of the hostel as planned. Yousef led them to the bookshop where he had seen the book “The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History”. Michael stood reading the newspaper headlines at the newspaper corner, and suddenly called to Yousef.

Michael: Yousef…See this exciting headline...It’s the subject of our very same conversation today: “The announcement of discovering a manuscript of the Qur’an in an Israeli library”.

Yousef: And I suppose you want to ask how this manuscript came to be in an Israeli library? I have already read this news yesterday on a website. Some analysis pointed to the theft of this manuscript from Iraq after the invasion of the coalition forces.

Michael: No, no... I do not mean that, I mean its relation to the genuineness of the Qur’an that exists now and its relation to the extent to which the Qur’an is authentic; the story says that the manuscript was written approximately 1200 years ago, i.e., only 200 years after the inscription of the first copies of the Qur’an, it is amazing news.

Yousef: My first point is that this isn’t the oldest copy of the Qur’an that has been discovered so far; Russians say that the oldest copy of the Qur’an is in their possession. The Russian researcher Efim Rezvan confirmed that the radioactive carbon analysis, which was run in the Netherlands, indicated that the Qur’an manuscript they have in their possession goes back to the eighth and ninth centuries.

While the Egyptians claim that they have the oldest copy of the Qur’an housed at the Al-Hussein Mosque in Cairo. The manuscript is close to 1400 years old, and it is one of the 6 copies of the Qur’an which were copied at the order of the third Caliph Osman bin Affan (may Allah be pleased with him) in order to save the Qur’an from being lost.

Moreover, in Yemen, they say that during renovation work at the Great Mosque of Sana’a, in 1972, they found a manuscript of the Qur’an that goes back to the time of the first Caliph Abu Bakr, who was a close companion of the Prophet of Islam (mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him)!

It may be that all that is true; because the number of copies of the

Qur'an which were written and sent to the different regions were several.

The second point I want to mention here is related to the saying that states that the Qur'an which the Muslims use nowadays is exactly the same as that of the time of the Prophet. This is a common saying of the scholars of different religions, and Orientalists admit it too. They, however, do not admit that it was revealed by Allah, while on the other hand, the authenticity of their Bible with its two Testaments has not been proven.

The French sociologist-Orientalist Ernest Renan says: "The Qur'an has not been changed or tampered with."

According to Dr. Michael Hart, the American writer of the book that we've come here to buy: "There isn't, in the history of revelations, a book which remained intact without any alteration, except the Qur'an conveyed by Muhammad." The German poet Goethe went beyond that to say: "The Qur'an is the book of books, and I believe that, as every Muslim does." In fact, he announced to the public when he reached the age of seventy that he intended to celebrate in awe the holy night in which the Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad.

Rajiv: This is our topic today: What really proves that the Qur'an is a revelation from God, and that Islam is the religion of Allah and revealed from the heavens?

Yousef: It isn't only the revealed religion of Allah, but it is the only religion now...

Michael: Let's stand aside so as not to bother the people in the bookshop with our voices!

Rajiv (Addressing Yousef while they were turning to a corner dedicated to discussions): If we agree to what you've said, what is the evidence that proves that?!

Yousef: I will prove to you, as much as time may allow us, the authenticity of Qur'an and that it is God's, and not Muhammad's, Word. I will also explain some aspects of its miraculous nature that shows the comprehensive knowledge of God which exceeds the limits of human beings.

Michael: Talk to us in the language that convinces us so that we can understand. Talk to us with science and reason.

Yousef: Those who follow churches call the book of their religion the

Holy Bible. Holiness, however, is contrary to contradiction and error, due to the contradiction that would happen with the qualities of the true God in such a case - the true God who is supposed to be perfect and free of any defaults so as to deserve this divinity... I will not talk about the attitude of the church towards science and the battle that began between it and scientists because of the clash of the texts of the Bible with science, but let's look at the Qur'an and its challenge in this area:

One contemporary Muslim scholar, Sheikh Abdul Majeed Al-Zindani, discussed with Professor Joe Leigh Simpson, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of North Weston in the US, the Qur'anic texts that talk about the early stages of the creation of an embryo, when it is still a sperm drop. He explained how the Qur'an mentions that a human is created after the male and female sperm drops meet and then the creation of the human starts. Subsequently, the features are decided: the color of the eyes, the skin, the hair, etc.... Modern science has proven that the genetic features of a human is decided when he is still a drop of semen. This is identical to what God says in the chapter called Abasa verses 17-19: [Cursed is man; how disbelieving is he. (17) From what substance did He create him? (18) From a sperm-drop He created him and destined for him (19)]. After the professor heard these details, he stood in a conference sharing his opinion on this subject. He said: "… there exist statements in the Qur'an shown centuries later to be valid, which indicates that the knowledge could have only been derived from God and that the Qur'an is the word of God."

Let me start up my computer so I can accurately read some quotes that can be used as proofs … This here is Professor Keith Moore, author of the book "The Developing Human" which is a global scientific reference that has been translated into eight languages. He said at a conference: "…the descriptions of the human embryo in the Qur'an cannot be based on the scientific knowledge in the seventh century.

The only reasonable conclusion is that these descriptions were revealed to Muhammad from God. He could not have known such details, because he was an illiterate man with absolutely no scientific training." Not only did Dr. Keith Moore say that, but he cited the verses of the Qur'an and prophetic traditions that mention scientific facts of embryology in every page of his book.

This is Professor Yoshihide Kozai, Director of the Observatory of Tokyo. He says: “I am very much impressed by finding true astronomical facts in the Qur’an…. So, by reading the Qur’an and by answering the questions, I think I can find my future way for investigation of the universe.” Do you want more?!

Rajiv: Does the Qur’an make mention of other areas of interest?

Yousef: There are many verses about several areas of interest...For example, there are verses that speak about historical facts that weren’t proven except by modern science. For example, in the story of Moses and Pharaoh, the Qur’an speaks about the death of Pharaoh by drowning, and the survival of his body, so that subsequent generations may learn a lesson from that, i.e. that it will be possible for generations to see his body and remember this lesson. Almighty God says in the chapter named Younis, verse 92: [So this day We shall deliver your (dead) body (out from the sea) that you may be a sign to those who come after you! And verily, many among mankind are heedless of Our Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs , revelations, etc.).]. Here, there are three points that are referred to:

The way Pharaoh died: by drowning.

His body was saved and recovered from the water.

The body is preserved in a form that makes it possible for people to see it (mummification).

This was actually proven by modern science, but on a mummified body that was discovered only in 1898, i.e. after the death of the messenger of Allah (mercy and blessing of Allah be upon him) by about 1200 years. The cause of death of the mummy that was discovered in 1981 was revealed to have been by drowning; and this was only found out by using advanced instruments and experiments, and complex analyzes that were conducted by a team of French scientists led by Professor Maurice Bucaille. The moment he became aware that the Qur’an of the Muslims proved this matter, he announced his conversion to Islam. Then he wrote his important book “The Bible, The Qur’an and Science. The Holy Scriptures Examined in the Light of Modern Knowledge”.

In the Qur’an there are verses that contain miracles in more than one area at one and the same time. In the chapter named Al-Room, God says: [Alif, Lam, Meem. (1) The Byzantines have been defeated (2) In the

nearest (adna) land. But they, after their defeat, will become victorious. (3)]... Here there are two miraculous points. The first is that the Qur'an foretells the victory of the Byzantines over the Persians, in a few years after their defeat. The word used to indicate this is Bid'a, i.e. between one and nine years. What the Qur'an had promised actually happened in seven years when another battle took place between the Persians and the Romans in the year 627 AD, in which the Romans were victorious.

The second aspect of this miraculous verse is that it mentions a geographical reality that wasn't known at the time, namely, that the battle was in the lowest "adna" area of land, as the word "adna" has two meanings for the Arabs: the nearest and the lowest. The area was on the one hand nearest to the Arabian Peninsula and on the other hand it is the lowest area on the surface of the earth, as it is 1312 feet (about 400 meters) below sea level. This is the lowest point recorded by satellites on earth, as reported by the Encyclopedia Britannica. The historical fact witnesses that the battle took place in the lowest regions in the world, in the basin of the Dead Sea, whose depth could never had been measured without modern measurement techniques.

Michael: I think that this is enough, Yousef.

Rajiv: But wait, I'd still like to know, does the Qur'an also speak about other areas of interest, for example astronomy and earth, marine sciences and others?

Yousef: Yes, in the Qur'an there are miraculous signs in these and other areas too, such as the beginning of the universe, the emergence of humans and information about medicine, botany, zoology, physics and the science of light. There are also miraculous historical and numerical signs, in addition to the miracle of its eloquence and the legislation it brought... And many others.

Michael: There are many topics that we could discuss, but unfortunately we will miss our friend Rajiv, because we are leaving tomorrow.

Rajiv: This saddens me so much. I'm really pleased to have met you both and I've benefited much from our discussions. I have an idea, why don't we continue our discussions and communicate via the Internet?

Yousef: Great idea! And what do you think about celebrating this occasion, to leave a beautiful memory of our acquaintance?

Michael and Rajiv: Perfect.

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Safe Haven

Safe Haven

Yousef and Michael took the train back to London and after it started moving, Michael said to Yousef:

Michael: You have mentioned more than once in our discussions "the purpose of the creation of man" and I consider it important, but feel that you haven't given it its due right. I remember you mentioned once that this purpose was to worship God...This issue has preoccupied me, as well as many other people I know. Often one passes through periods and is in situations in which he wonders: Why do I exist in this world? Why am I inflicted with this misery? Why is there this constant struggle between human beings, even between human beings and the universe? Aren't these important questions?

Yousef: Yes, of course, they are important and I think that this goes back to the moral and cultural composition of the western man. Inevitability of struggle is a basic component upon which the materialistic western culture is established. This concept is derived from both the Greek and Roman ancient civilizations, upon the ruins of which were built today's western culture. One basic concept in these two civilizations is the inevitability of the struggle: struggle between the gods, struggle between man and God, struggle between man and nature, struggle between the forces of evil and the forces of good, in addition to the spiritual emptiness caused by materialism that has characterized contemporary western civilization ..

Michael: You speak as if you have the alternative magic formula you can provide for humanity.

Yousef: The issue for the Muslim with true faith isn't that confusing or muddling, actually. A Muslim, any Muslim, knows through his Islam from where he came and to where his fate will lead him. He knows the reality of this world in which he lives, the aim of this life and its value, and the function of humanity in it.

Michael: My question still stands, in fact I added to it many other questions. What are the answers these questions according to Islam?

Yousef: A Muslim feels that he is in harmony with the universe and its components, and that these things share, with a righteous worshipper,

his submission to and glorification of God Almighty, either voluntarily and explicitly, as is the case of the human world, or in a natural manner that is unknown to us for the world of nature. It is repeatedly stated in the Qur'an that "The universe glorifies and praises God" and the word "yosabeh", which means to glorify or praise, is mentioned more than thirty times in the Qur'an, as well as other words that also mean to glorify or praise. Thus, the conscious Muslim is aware that he is a member of a universal choir singing the praise and glorification of God. He is in harmony with the universe and its elements, and not in dissonance and struggle with them.

He also feels the companionship of nature and considers it as a friend and not an enemy. The Qur'an confirms that everything in the universe is subjugated to man, to mankind. This is explicitly confirmed in this same wording more than twenty times in the Qur'an, and is repeated several times in other wordings.

Michael: And what is the aim of that? What are the consequences of that?

Yousef: If we consider what a human being needs for his heart to be reassured and tranquil, and for himself to be happy and live his life (in a good way)... we find that it falls into five words: surrender, submission, obedience, loyalty, and trust. This is achieved practically when the human being puts himself under the umbrella of loving servitude to God, which covers the entire universe, and we note that these five words are the meaning of Islam.

Michael: (Frowning) I wish that you'd make yourself clearer.

Yousef: One of the most important fruits of such a perception of the relationship of humans with the universe is what is reflected on those who believe with regards to having a sense of inner peace with oneself and one's surroundings, and one living by one clear-cut principle in his life, which facilitates one to translate his one set of feelings to one particular pattern in his behavior. Thus, there is a state of balance in one's life, a balance that takes into account all dimensions of humanity; spiritual, mental and physical.

The Muslim who knows that God told us that He created everything on earth: [He it is Who created for you all that is on earth.] and He said, [And has subjected to you all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth; it is all as a favor and kindness from Him.], knows that God wouldn't create everything for us and subject it to us and then make us not have any relationship or link with it! Therefore, there must be some clarification of the relationship between humans and what God has created for them. If that is the case, then God Almighty must reveal to humans knowledge that governs that relationship between man and all these things, because He, the Almighty, said [Surely, His is the creation and the command,] and He said [Does man think that he will be left neglected?] that is, can act in this world without any controls or commands and prohibitions. If the case is that there must be some clarification of this relationship, then a Muslim must learn and look into his religion in order to see what he can use to achieve universal justice and legitimacy on earth.

Islam stems from this basis to provide a comprehensive approach to life and to organize the Muslim's relationship with God concerning acts of worship and spirituality, just as it regulates his life in his dealings, such as his marriage and divorce, as well as the legislation of selling and buying... Islam also organizes habits of eating and drinking, sleeping, clothing, entering and leaving his house. Islam even directs the Muslim in his personal cleanliness and also regulates his relationship with society and country, and his relationship to other societies, to include all the different basic areas of life in legislation, economy, politics, culture and the society, forming a complete system covering and organizing all aspects of life.

Islam also deals with the feelings of the Muslim, for it legislates for him his laws and sets up the scales of justice and fairness for him. This religion commands the Muslim to populate the earth and enrich it with life and civilization, and permanently search to discover the vast horizons of the universe and the depth of the souls. All that stems from the framework of the relationship with God Almighty and of submitting to worshipping Him. When these everyday customary behaviors are linked to God's path; they turn into acts of worship dedicated to Him.

Michael: Wow! That was quite a mouthful, which raises my fears of drifting towards extremism and strictness, or let me frankly say: religion controlling life.

Yousef: We must know that everything has a system according to which its elements are organized. Each element has its location and its use. And by linking all these elements together into a unified whole, the benefit of this system is produced and activated, and its overall objective is achieved. This is what God calls the balance in the verse: [And the heaven He has raised high, and He has set up the balance. (7) In order that you may not transgress (due) balance. (8) And observe the weight with equity and do not make the balance deficient. (9)]. The balance is justice, and that balance which is just exists in everything. And as this universe is founded on the balance and measure, and on these two the overall system and its minute details are also built, this religion revealed by the Creator of this very universe is also based on the balance and justice.

Balancing matters and preventing the transgression of rights over each other is a general feature of Islam, which is reflected in man being just and moderate with himself and in his dealing with others.

When one is moderate and reasonable in his conception of himself and how he regards himself, this will usually affect the opinion he has about others. The meaning of this moderation and reasonableness is clear in what God describes the righteous as saying in their supplication [Our Lord! Give us in this world that which is good and in the Hereafter that which is good, and save us from the torment of the fire!]. And also the same meaning is mentioned in the holy verses: [And seek by means of what Allah has given you the future abode, and do not neglect your portion of this world, and do good (to others) as Allah has done good to you, and do not seek to make mischief in the land, surely Allah does not love the mischief-makers], [And those, who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor niggardly, but hold a medium (way) between the extremes], [And let not your hand be tied (like a miser) to your neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach (like a spendthrift), so that you become blameworthy and in severe poverty.]

Michael: What also really worries me is that man is sucking the blood of his fellow man. Human morality has deteriorated so much that it has led to the powers which were given by God to man being made use of in matters which bring devastation and destruction to humans, rather than being used to bring their happiness, security and well-being. How does

Islam perceive this problem?

Yousef: This is a kind of punishment prepared by man himself for himself in this world. There's no reason for that, except that man vainly tries to operate a device though he has no knowledge about the parts he in maneuvering. The secrets of this human device are unknown except to He who made it, only He knows its nature, and only He knows how to operate this device in a truly compatible and harmonious way. Now if man stops himself from committing his follies and allows himself to be committed to following the law laid down by He who made this device, man may be able to fix what he has spoiled so far, otherwise, there is no cure for what he is now suffering of calamities, perils, miseries, loss, woe and destruction.

Michael: You mean to say that there is no survival except by following the path of Islam, otherwise humanity will live in misery?

Yousef: This is self-evident, at both the individual and collective level, in the world and in the Hereafter; there is nothing that can put an end to the unruliness and ferocity of man in this world except his sense of that liability and responsibility he has on his shoulders. If a person thinks that he can do what he wants in this world and that no one will ask him about what he does and there is no force above him that will punish him for what he does, then there will never be an end to his unruliness and ferocity. As this is true with respect to individuals, it is also true in relation to the entire nation, or all the inhabitants of the earth. It is a test for us all, the test to see if we recognize that we should worship and be submissive to our Creator and King.

You and I, and all those who God has given life on this earth, are facing this test. We all are being tested in our minds and how we act, and in our sense of duty and loyalty. Each one of us therefore has to decide: Is this loyalty to this real King really true, or is it false?

As for me, I have decided to follow the road of obedience and loyalty, and won't obey those who don't obey God. This is the safe haven.

Michael: The train has reached its terminus...Let's go.

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Divine Law

Divine Law

The three friends gathered as agreed and Michael requested to open the discussion, saying:

Michael: I read an interesting book today. It was written by a specialist in Oriental Studies. He mentioned various issues about Islamic law and I would like to discuss them with both of you.

Rajiv: A very important topic.

Yousef: If possible, please mention these issues one by one, so that we can discuss them carefully.

Michael: Good. I'll begin then by mentioning what mostly snatched my attention, and I don't mind if Rajiv asks any questions on this matter without adhering to what is mentioned in the book.

Yousef: Go ahead.

Michael: The book said that Islamic law was borrowed from Roman law and that they share similar details.

Yousef: Let me mention that such a claim is out-of-date and most Orientalists today do not support such a view. I, myself, met a great Russian Orientalist, who is a specialist in law and Islamic law as well. His name is Leonid Sukiyanen, and his actual words were: "There are no Western scholars nowadays who still adhere to the idea that Islamic law was borrowed from Roman law. This idea was common in the nineteenth century. The idea used to be believed by some Western scholars, but now the Western legal thought acknowledges, without any restrictions or conditions, that the Islamic legislation is an independent legal system that wasn't influenced by Roman law."

This is the first point. The second is that the source of Islamic legislation is quite different from that of other legislations, and I have stated repeatedly to you that Islam is an integrated system. When considering legislation, it is linked to the rights of God over His creation, thus He charges them with certain obligations that achieve the aim they were created for, and His right over them is for them not to deviate from being obedient to Him as they are servants in His kingdom. The source of legislation inherent in Islam is therefore the revelation represented in the Qur'an and the prophetic Sunnah, and we all know that the messenger

of Islam was illiterate, and that it is natural that there isn't any chance for those who are in such circumstances to read – let alone borrow - from other sources, especially if they were foreign to him.

This is what the Orientalist David de Santillana said, "Vainly do we try to find one origin from which the east and west (i.e. Islamic and Roman) civilizations sprout, which is a matter that is agreed upon. Islamic law that has set up limits and established principles cannot be referred or attributed to our legislations and laws, because it is a religious law that is primarily in direct contrast to our ideas..."

Concerning what might arise of similarities with other legislative systems, it is the result of the similarity of human problems and the similarity in finding solutions for them. This may cause an agreement, if their basis is the assessment of interests and evils in similar environments, or these similarities may arise from natural human instinct, such as that referred to in the saying of the Prophet, mercy and blessing of the highest degree be upon him: "Evidence is an obligation on the claimant, and an oath is due on him who denies the validity of the claim."

Michael: But the possibility still remains that the Islamic law might have borrowed from the Jewish and Canon law, as they are two heavenly religions recognized by Islam.

Yousef: I'll answer you with the words of one of the most prominent Western specialist thinkers, Joseph Schacht, a German Orientalist, who said: "Islamic law is considered as an example which is different from all other religions, as it has laws which are specific to it In fact, the other two sanctified legislations, which are considered models of religious law and which are the closest to Islamic law both historically and geographically - the Jewish and Canon law - significantly differ from that of their Islamic counterpart. Islamic law is more diverse than them, because it was the result of consideration and scrutiny according to the religious viewpoint in subjects of the law, which were far from taking a single set form…"

In fact, Schacht professes the possibility which is opposite to that which you posed. He says: "...At the opposite end of the Mediterranean Sea, we find that the Islamic legislation has profoundly affected all branches of law...The Islamic law also influenced the laws of the people of other religions, the Jews and the Christians, who were encompassed by the tolerance of Islam and lived in the Islamic state...There is no doubt that

the two large sections of the eastern Christian Church, the Jacobeans and the Nestorians, did not hesitate to borrow freely from the rules of the Islamic law, and this borrowing was in all those subjects that one could imagine would come under the consideration of a Muslim judge..."

Rajiv: So, why don't you tell us about the differences between Islamic legislation and other legislations?

Yousef: It would be difficult to mention these differences, especially since you didn't specify a particular legislation for me to compare, however it is possible to mention the general characteristics of Islamic legislation, and then you can simply compare between these features and others yourself.

Rajiv: That's fine with me.

Yousef: The most important features of Islamic legislation comprise the following:

Being from divine source - as I've already mentioned to you. It draws its topics out of two key sources, namely the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him. With regards to the human role, it is obligated to follow this law and legislate from it, projecting it on all matters of life. Its provisions aim to connect people to their Creator, and this is due to the fact that it comes from God.

Combining stability and flexibility. Its stability lies in its roots, its generalities and decisive facts (about which there is no difference of opinion), which can neither be altered nor amended, a matter which protects the legislation from being vague and indecisive or from blindly following other laws. Its flexibility lies in its peripheral matters (as opposed to the basics), details and inferences (about which there is a difference of opinion), which cast on it the ability to generate legislations as events happen and make it responsive to the developments of each time.

Inclusiveness (in relation to time, place, human beings and provisions). In relation to time, the Islamic legislation is suitable to be implemented in all ages and times, in relation to place, it is suitable to be applied without being bound by any geographical limits, and in relation to humans, it speaks to all people. Pertaining to its provisions, i.e. the actual laws, they include all affairs of life and addresses the human being in all stages of his life, in all his affairs, and coexists with him in all of life's stages: as an

embryo, as a child, as a young man, as an old man and honoring him when he is dead. The Islamic law also governs all human relationships with God, with himself and with others.

Realism in Islamic legislation is reflected in the fact that it considered the real-life situations of the people when the laws were laid down and also when dealing with them. It also takes into account all human aspects: physical, spiritual, mental, individual and collective, and does not neglect the energy of individuals and groups in the course of its application.

Moderation and temperance is represented in the Islamic legislation by its rules being set between all extremes. It takes the center path between these extremes, which gives it strength and permanence. Islamic legislation, for instance, has provided controlled individual ownership of property that falls in the center between its total abolition as in communism and its liberation from all restrictions as in capitalism. Islamic legislation also urges us to have a type of courage which is between cowardice and recklessness. And orders us to spend without being stingy or being extravagant...And so on.

Combining the punishment of this world and that of the hereafter. Islamic legislation agrees with the other laws and legal systems about inflicting punishment against the violator of its provisions in this world, while the hands of the man-made law don't stretch to punish that violator in the hereafter. But Islamic law threatens the violator with punishment in the hereafter, and so it combines both punishments.

Taking into account the interests of all, and also not clashing with science over scientific facts.

Michael: Yousef, you always try to improve the image of your religion with tact and skill.

Yousef: My friend, the issue isn't a question of religious fanaticism, or else what's your opinion about what that great German poet Goethe said: "Legislation in the West is incomplete if compared with the Islamic teachings, and we, the people of Europe, with all our concepts, have not yet attained that which Muhammad had attained, and will not be able to surpass him," or did Goethe say that because he also was a Muslim?

Rajiv: The last point in the features of the Islamic legislation you've mentioned needs to be clarified!

Yousef: I shall give you an example of the agreement between Islamic law and science. It is known that Islamic law insists that animals that are slaughtered for food should be slaughtered in a certain way, and it also places limits on the kind of animals that are permitted to be lawfully consumed. Though there are other conditions needed when slaughtering, I shall only discuss the method of slaughtering here.

The Islamic method requires that live animals be slaughtered by severing their jugular vein, but not by cutting off the neck of the slaughtered animal completely, resulting in decapitation. This enables the muscles to continue moving after the slaughter has taken place and allows the animal freedom of movement, and the wisdom in this is that it aids in getting rid of as much blood as possible from the animal. In the non-Islamic methods of slaughtering, the animal is killed without invoking the name of God on it, and in ways that are not suitable, such as choking by gas, electrocution, or shooting. Such methods prevent the animal from moving its muscles which causes congestion of the body with the blood, and so the blood stays in the body of the animal, thus becoming a fertile land for different types of germs to reproduce. When this blood breaks down in the human body (after ingestion), it results in toxic compounds. In addition to this, these methods are painful and make the animal suffer.

However let me add here an interesting remark about the requirement for invoking the name of God when slaughtering. Though it might seem, from the initial or materialistic view which only cares about killing the animal to cook it for food, that there is no need to invoke the name of God, in Islam, everything is linked to Monotheism, and the legislation is related to the entire system of religion, according to the answers of the major questions about (God - the universe - humans - destiny). In this case man, being one of God's creatures, has no right to attack another of His creatures and take its life without the permission of the Creator of its soul, even when it is related to the establishment of man's life. Thus, invoking the name of God on the slaughtered animal is an indication of the declaration of the sovereignty of God Almighty, and that this act of a Muslim is not without the permission of his Creator, who has permitted him to do this, and that the Muslim is totally subordinate to Him.

Michael: I admit to you that getting acquainted with Islamic legislation and understanding its essence and secrets need deep study and consideration.

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Facts about Civilization

Facts about Civilization

Rajiv began the meeting with his friends by showing them some photographs that he had recently taken, explaining:

Rajiv: I took these during my visit to Turkey upon the invitation of one of my friends. I have been struck by what I saw of the effects and manifestations of this civilization in that country which has such a long history. My friend surprised me with information about the aspects of Islamic civilization in his country, and made me recall what I had seen in my country India.

Michael: But I have other information on the Islamic civilization that represents another aspect of this civilization.

Yousef: I think that we should first define the concept of civilization, and then evaluate, if we wish, the Islamic civilization.

Michael: I think that we can all agree on this concept!

Yousef: Still, there is no harm in identifying it first, and if we already agree upon it, then we can set off from that point.

Michael: Civilization is the product of human and humanitarian (both physical and intellectual) activity, by which a society reflects its creativity and progress within a specified time.

Rajiv: To add a little detail to Michael's explanation, a civilization is a social order that helps man to increase his cultural production. Moreover, civilization is composed of four components: Economic resources, political systems, moral traditions, and the pursuit of science and the arts.

Civilization is based on scientific research and fine art, in the first place. The scientific side is represented in technical innovations and sociology. As for the side of fine art, it is found in architecture, sculptures and some of the arts that contribute to advancement, as art and science are two complementary elements that drive any civilization.

Yousef: I first want to comment on the words of my friend Michael; if we adopt the concept he has just mentioned, it should be noted that civilization is a human activity in the first place. As a result of noting that, all dimensions of the components of man must be considered, without neglecting any of them, otherwise the civilization would be considered as being incomplete, or it cannot, to begin with, be described as a civilization. This is one point.

The other point is that aspects of a civilization may differ from one

human society to another, as they are a reflection of the values that this society is based upon. Accordingly, looking at the correctness or wrongness of these values and their compatibility with human rights and their consistency with its environment is a measure of the goodness or the corruption of that civilization. This is what shows us the wide disparities between different civilizations and the tragedy experienced by humanity under the Western, especially the contemporary, civilization.

Michael: I see that Mr. Yousef is trying to evade the discussion of the darker sides of the Islamic civilization, which we were going to consider.

Rajiv: Perhaps this is why we should request from Yousef to mention the characteristics of the Islamic civilization, and how it differs from that of other civilizations.

Yousef: Well, the Islamic civilization is based upon the Islamic perception of man, the universe and life. I shall mention to you its most important characteristics, but let me also add the counterparts of these characteristics in contemporary Western culture.

The most important characteristics of the Islamic civilization are:

Man in the Islamic perspective - upon which this civilization is founded - is a creature who is subservient to the Supreme Lord, and is living on this earth as a trustee, entrusted with propagating Allah's way of life and with a free choice, and therefore, he is ordered to do the good deeds that are indicated in this way of life. He also will be held responsible for his voluntary actions, in this life and in the Hereafter.

As for the view of the contemporary Western civilization towards man, it is that he is the master of the universe. He is free, not constrained by anything except in what he himself specifies, out of his sovereignty over himself and the universe. His interests revolve around his desires and pleasures, which are interests he shares with other animals. The Western civilization believes that man was created uselessly for no purpose, and he will not be taken to account except in the context he himself defines. Moreover, all man's goals in the Western civilization are inferior, worldly goals.

The universe in the Islamic perspective is also a creature which is subservient to a Supreme Lord, just as man is. The difference, however, is that the universe was created to serve man, and thus a human being who follows Allah's way is always in harmony with that universe, and is at one and feels at peace with it.

As for the Western civilization perspective of the universe, it is centered on a conflict, not a harmonious relationship, between man and the universe. And in such a case, the battle is fierce between the two.

The Islamic perception of life is that it is owned by the One Who created it and created this universe. It is a station in the process of a life greater than what we perceive, for there is a worldly life, ending by the death of all human beings, and there is another life that awaits us after death. Man is commanded to establish life on this earth in a way that pleases Allah, man's Creator and the Creator of the universe and of all human life. This worldly life is cultivating ground for the Hereafter, and there will be an accounting and reckoning of man for those actions he did in this worldly life.

The Western civilization, on the other hand, regards this life only as a worldly life. It does not believe in a Hereafter or in being held accountable, or in the reckoning. Man's opportunity, therefore, is only in this worldly life.

From all that, we can deduce that it is impossible for the Western civilization to meet with the Islamic civilization on a common ground with regards to the way they perceive matters, for they are on opposite sides.

Michael: But allow me Mr. Yousef to make two remarks on what you've just said:

First is that you left out an important aspect of Western civilization, which is the Christian religion, and also the Jewish. You say, for example, that the Western civilization believes that, where life is concerned, there is no Hereafter and there is no being held accountable, nor is there any reckoning. This is not true; both religions believe in the Hereafter, but the details of this belief are different from one religion to the other.

The Second thing is that what you've just said is with regards to the foundations of the Islamic civilization as compared with Western civilization, but you did not address the underlying characteristics of the Islamic civilization, as our friend Rajiv asked you to.

Yousef: As for the first remark, I disagree with you as there is a difference between the foundations of the civilization and the components of the society that created this civilization. There is no doubt that Christianity and Judaism has had an impact on Western civilization, but we cannot at all claim that Western civilization is built on the basis of these two religions. Rather, we can confirm exactly the opposite, which is that it has

been founded on what contradicts with religion in general and with the control of the church in particular, i.e., it has been founded on abstract rationality and pure worldliness, which is crystallized in secularism, which in turn means the separation of religion from everyday life, and I think that you both agree with me on this.

I, however, agree with you about the second remark, but I will add to it that from these foundations the characteristics of Islamic civilization can be deducted, which are:

That heavy industry in the Islamic civilization is put to use to leave a good impact on man, aiming at taking into account the make-up of man, the satisfaction of his humanity, him being in harmony with the universe, and the attainment of the purpose of his creation.

Keeping a suitable link and interaction between religion as a part of daily life and dealings on the one hand, and between religion as a part of intellectual thought to develop the mind and science on the other, so as to produce behavior and cultural activity that is built on this link and interaction (so forming a well-rounded personality).

Coherence and compatibility in the basic, accepted sources of human knowledge. All the facts, those related to matter and those related to what is beyond that (unseen matters), can be known by man; he knows them using his different faculties, which support one another, since his actions resulting from his instinctive faculty are a result of what he feels with his sensory faculties, and how he understands these sensory faculties depend on his mental faculties, and the use of one's mental faculty enables one to start asking about the unseen, a matter that depends on his faculty of belief, as the knowledge of the unseen only comes through revelation, and recognizing and complying with this revelation.

Openness to other cultures and civilizations and being affected by them, as well as having an impact on them. This results in adopting the features of other nations which are consistent with the foundations of the Islamic civilization, and opening the way for other nations to take advantage of the features and ideas of the Islamic civilization.

Rajiv: Pardon me, Mr. Yousef, but Michael has said that he has information on a dark side of the Islamic civilization. Please allow us to listen to him to get a complete picture.

Michael: The most important thing about this aspect is that the state that founded this civilization was established by the sword, and it was

associated with force and violence.

Yousef: The sword, my friend, does not create a civilization, because one of the most important conditions of a civilization is stability, which is inconsistent with the state of war. Moreover, military victory does not necessarily mean a victory in the fields of thought, culture and civilization, and you can contemplate the history of the Tatars and Mongols, and other nations that have had an overwhelming military force, but they did not make such a strong civilization.

But if you are referring to those allegations about the spreading of Islam and its expansion through Jihad (Holy War), let me just point out that Islam has spread and its civilization was established in a large area of the world that the Islamic armies did not reach. This subject has many details, but I shall refer you to the testimonies of some Western thinkers in this regard. The American author Lothrop Stoddard writes in his book (The New World of Islam) : "…They (Arabs) were no bloodthirsty savages, bent solely on loot and destruction. On the contrary, they were an innately gifted race, eager to learn and appreciative of the cultural gifts which older civilizations had to bestow. Intermarrying freely and professing a common belief, conquerors and conquered rapidly fused, and from this fusion arose a new civilization, the Arab civilization."

French army colonel Count Henri de Castri said, ".. We believe that surveying the state of this religion in the present age does not show any trace of what some claim concerning it being spread at the point of the sword. If the religion of Muhammad [peace be upon him] was spread by violence and coercion then, by necessity, Islam would have stopped spreading upon the termination of the Muslim conquests. Yet we continue to see the Qur'an spreading its wings all over the inhabited earth..."

I cannot find a word that is able to express the impact of Islamic civilization on the history of mankind that is more honest than that of the French historian Gustave Le Bon:

"We cannot find in history a nation that made such a prominent impact as the Arabs did, for all nations which were connected to the Arabs embraced their civilization, even if it was just for some specific time..."

Finally: It is possible for you to see how life has started to be threatened by the destruction of humans through destructing their human characteristics, which is the case under the existing civilization; a matter which makes the establishment of an Islamic community a human necessity, and a natural inevitability.

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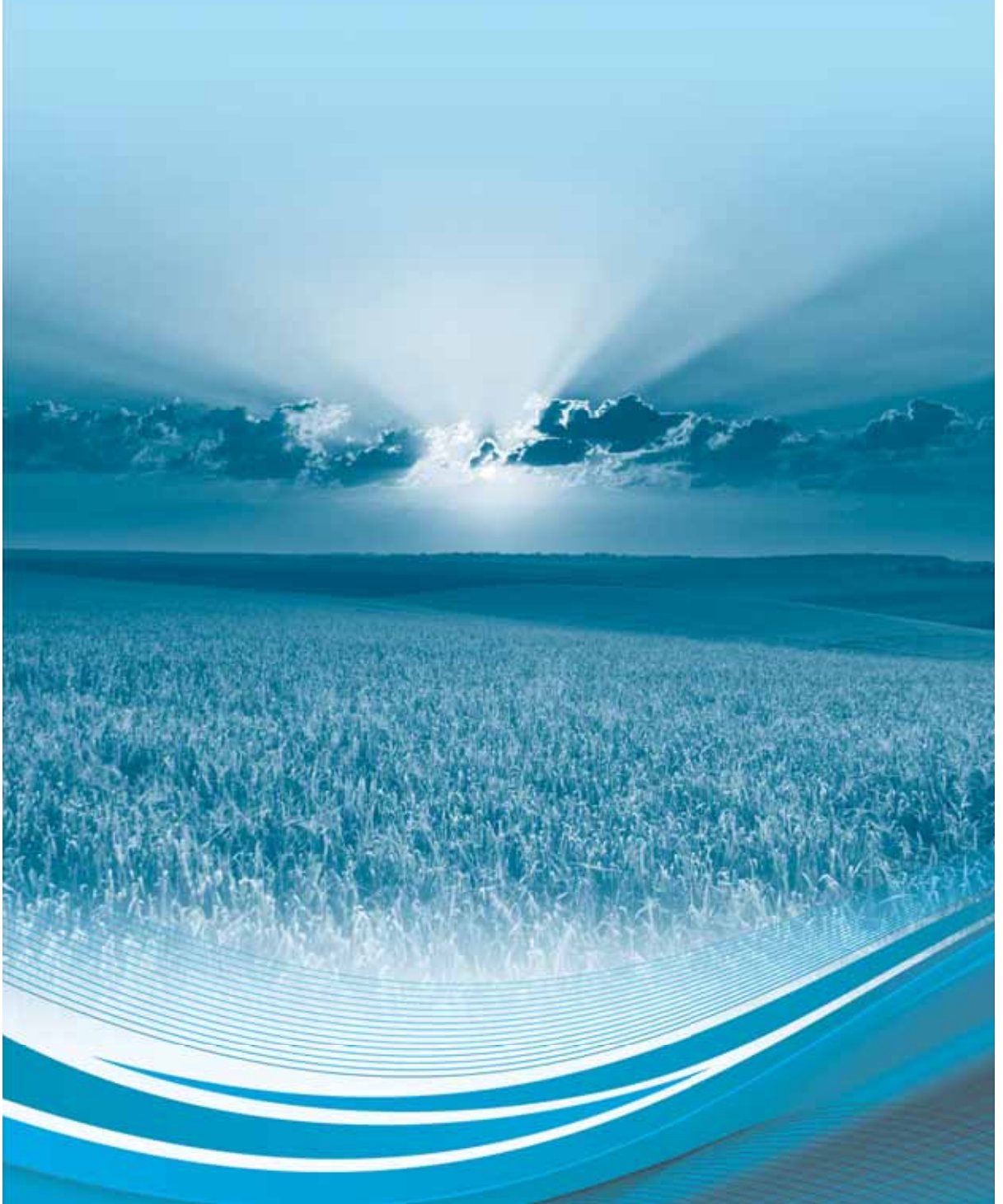
The Rays of Muslims Rise over Humanity



The Rays of Muslims Rise over Humanity

After greeting each other, Rajiv and Yousef noticed that Michael was serious in wanting to begin the conversation. Yousef teased him, saying:

Yousef: "Hey Michael! Did you prepare shooting arrows for this meeting?! I'll try to keep away from the screen just in case!"

Michael: No, no! Calm down! This time you can stare at your screen without worrying. In fact, our last conversation on cultural exploration inspired me, and I tried to learn more about the Muslims' contribution to human progress. I found this documentary film "One Thousand and One Inventions, and The Library of Secrets". The duration of the movie is short, about only thirteen minutes, but it is really exciting and interesting, and very suitable for the topic at hand. It describes how the Islamic civilization contributed to the modern progress of man. This film was awarded more than twenty international prizes.

The film adopts the technique of telling a story, where a librarian guides some teenagers while visiting a library on their school trip. During the visit, they explore the era that is called "The Dark Ages". The legendary actor, Sir Ben Kingsly, plays the role of the librarian, who later plays the role of the Muslim scientist, Al-Gazri, who presents some Muslim scholars who lived at that time. He introduces the great wealth of inventions and innovations that were witnessed in the Islamic World during that era, which extended from the 7th century to the 17th century; a period that is considered to have an interesting history, though it has never been well-appreciated.

Yousef: Could you briefly mention the summary of the film then? And what is its aim?

Michael: The film aims at proving that the main factor and motive for the birth of the Renaissance in Europe was the scientific and cultural achievements witnessed in the Islamic World, which later opened new and wide horizons that were discovered by pioneers, scientists and inventors of different religions. The film implies that this notion is a historical fact that is still largely forgotten.

Rajiv: I am now more interested to learn the details of what you are saying.

Michael: There are many details regarding this field, among which are: Al Gazry, one of the greatest engineers, chemists and inventors in history, invented "The Elephant Watch", which is legendary. He also invented many of the mechanisms in the machines we use everywhere in our daily life. For example, mechanic devices produced according to old specifications show how wind and water energy could be used; making a revolution in the agricultural world. There is also the Andalusian doctor, Al Zahrawy, who invented hundreds of surgical tools and utensils thousands of years ago. Still to this date, his invention of different utensils continues to save patients' lives in modern hospitals. There is also Al Hassan Bin Al Haytham who was the first to explain how the eye works. During the film, we see a huge model of a camera with a tiny hole, in order to learn how Ibn Al Haytham established photography and movie-making.

Rajiv: You've added some valuable information, Mr Michael, but it's not only you who was interested and delved into this topic. I have also dug into it myself and found a very interesting book of a German author called Sigrid Hunke, entitled ""The Rays of the Light of Allah's over the Occident."

Michael: What new information did you find in it?

Rajiv: It actually drew my attention to many things I didn't expect. Do you know that many common words in the European languages are of Arabic origin?

Michael: Really! That is something really odd! Are you serious?

Rajiv: I'm not kidding my friend! For example, the word "coffee" in English and its correspondent words in other languages is derived from the Arabic word /kahwa/, and from which came the derivation that indicates the place where we go for a coffee. The word "rice" is derived from the Arabic word /urz/. The word "sofa" in English is /sof.fa/ in Arabic; which means a shaded seat beside the mosque. Moreover, I found many words with scientific denotations which are phonetically identical to the Arabic pronunciation, such as "alcohol".

The book introduces many facts that I was unaware of. The writer summarized them by saying, “Europe and all other continents owe much to the Arabs and the Arabic civilization. Europe should have admitted this favor long ago, but bigotry and the different doctrines blurred or even blinded our eyes.”

Yousef: You have made me very interested, Rajiv, to learn which of the facts that you didn’t know drew your attention the most.

Rajiv: For example, I didn’t know that the first to discover and criticize Galenus’ mistakes and then lay down the theory of blood circulation wasn’t the Spanish Servetus, or the English Harvey. It was Ibn Al-Nafees; a man of Arabic origin in the third century A.D., who achieved this great discovery in human and medical history some 400 years ago before Harvey, and 300 years before Servetus. Moreover, I didn’t know that Ibn Al-Haytham, the Muslim Arab scientist, was the first to correct the mistakes of Euclid and Ptolemy who believed that sight worked by the eye emitting rays of light on the objects that were to be seen. Ibn Al-Haytham proved this belief to be wrong. He argued that the process of vision occurs neither by rays emitted from the eye, nor through physical forms entering it, rather, visible objects reflect rays onto the eye, and then the lens of the eye make a visual image of the object from these rays. I also didn’t know that Al-Biruni (known as Alberonius in Latin), a Muslim Arab scientist, was the one who discovered that the Earth rotates around the Sun and around itself, and not Copernicus or others, as people often assume. This remarkable orientalist also mentioned that the Muslim physician, Al Razy, is considered, by all historians, as one of the greatest physicians in all ages. His essay concerning chickenpox and measles is the first elaborated work on contiguous diseases; illustrating their extraordinary ability to carry out clinical analysis and observation (to be able to notice and analysis illnesses). This essay was so widely-spread in Europe that it was printed 40 times in English from 1489 till 1866. He also mentioned that in those ages, which were called “The Dark Ages”, the Arabs used to practice anesthetization, which is thought to be one of the modern inventions. History witnessed, though, that the technique of using the anesthetic sponge is purely an Arab technique that had never been used before their time. And there are also many other details, so many that it is difficult to mention them all in a conversation like this one.

Yousef: What you have mentioned refute the claims of some people who know nothing about historical facts, or even deny them, by saying that Arabs and Muslims didn't add anything new to humanity, especially with regards to experimental sciences. While on the contrary, humanity wasn't aware of the experimental method itself but from the hands of Muslims and Arabs. Allow me to quote some of the Western scientists' declarations regarding this aspect.

Claude Cahun, the French orientalist, said , "…and if Muslim scientists, despite their intellectual inclination, have less ability to abstract results than Greece, they made up for this due to their strong desire to perform experiments. The later scientific progress manifested the significance of this tendency. The science brought by the Arabs is that which they practiced in their daily life, and for that reason it survived. Al-Razy, as one of the greatest scientists, expressed clearly that scientific progress would continue, (due to there still being so much to learn), which was considered an odd belief by most of the thinkers in the Medieval Age." Laura Feshia Fagleri, an Italian researcher, said, "…Was it not the Arabs who first invented experimental methods, long before Bacon declared the necessity of such methods? The development of chemistry, astronomy, the spread of Greek science, enhancement of medicine, and the discovery of different physical laws: are all these not the achievements of the Arabs?" Will Durant, an American philosopher and historian, said, "…Arabic sciences developed the scientific experimental method in chemistry, which is one of the greatest and most significant modern intellectual tools. Bacon introduced this method to Europe five hundred years after Jaber Ibn Hayyan had declared it. It was the light which emerged from the Arabs of Andalusia that guided him. This light is only a small ember of the light of the Muslims in the East."

And this is only a fraction of what can be related about the unique achievements of the Islamic Arab civilization which it offered to humanity.

Michael: Indeed, these are undeniable achievements. However, we shouldn't forget that this civilization also incorporated aspects of previous ones, such as the Greek civilization.

Yousef: Oh my friend, this is the nature of scientific progress. It is a continuous chain of human achievements, as whole, which is known as

a civilizational series. This is confirmed by the French orientalist Aldo Mieli, who said, “This Arab science is the connecting and continuous link between the old civilization and the new world. If we don’t understand and contemplate this science of the Arabs, we shall find an inexplicable gap between the old civilizations and the new ones.”

Toby Huff, a professor at Harvard University, history of science department, and the author of “The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China, and The West” said, “The transmission of scientific and philosophical knowledge which had accumulated and stockpiled in the Islamic-Arab civilization to the West, through the great efforts which the Europeans exerted in translating it in the Middle Ages, had a great impact on the course of Western intellectual development.”

But allow me to say that the achievements of the Islamic Arab civilization have distinguishing characteristics that other civilizations did not have. Most of all:

Islamic science has never been separated from religion, which was its inspiration and main stimulating strength.

And the sciences of Muslims weren’t secrets; rather, Muslims were very keen to spread these sciences among people of different persuasions. Muslim universities were open to European students, who came from their countries to seek knowledge.

I am really proud of this civilization.

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Man…..When He is One of the Untouchables

Man…..When He is One of the Untouchables

Rajiv and Yousef entered the dialogue room before Michael, and Rajiv started the conversation by saying:

Rajiv: There is a matter I'd like to discuss and it's important for me to know the view of Islam concerning it, because there is a relationship between it and the view that Islam holds.

Yousef: Please, go on.

Rajiv: In my home country, India, there once was a class that was called the Untouchables, but nowadays they go by the name the Harijan, or (God's children). This name was given to them by the historic leader of India, Mahatma Gandhi. Although the use of the word "Untouchables" was banned by the Indian government in 1949, reality shows and studies have reveale, that this untouchability still exists in rural areas and small towns.

Yousef: And what is the problem with this untouchability?

Rajiv: Actually, it's not a problem, but more like a tragedy... A human tragedy that reflects the denial of human rights in the worst form of denial.

At this point of the conversation Michael joined his friends and greeted them.

Yousef: Hello Michael, Rajiv began talking just a short while ago, I'm sure you will be able to pick up the subject while we carry on. Continue Rajiv please...

Rajiv: This has ensued due to the social stratification that originates from the Hindu religion. Those in the top class are called the Brahmins. According to their belief they are the ones who were created from the mouth of the god, Brahma, and it is from this class that teachers, priests and judges come. They are followed by the Kshatriyas, who were created from their god's arms. They learn, make sacrifices and bear arms for defense. Then they are followed by the Vaishyas, who were created from his thigh. They plant, trade and collect money which they spend on seminaries. Then lying at the bottom of the classes are the Shudras, who were created from his feet. They, along with the aborigine Negro peoples, make up the Untouchables, and their work is limited to offering services

to the three previous honorable sects, working in despicable and dirty jobs.

Yousef: I understand what you mean...

Rajiv: I'm not done, you haven't heard everything yet.

Michael: What? You mean there's worse? And is this separation still in force now?

Rajiv: Yes, I mentioned to Yousef that the treatment of the untouchables in accordance with this separation still exists, especially in rural areas. There are practices one can't imagine that fall on this class. The Hindu laws of Menu that were composed in the third century BC are established on the Shudras and the Untouchables, as a way of showing contempt towards them. These laws inscribe that he who teaches a Shudra matters of the Hindu religion will accompany that Shudra in hell. Also the Untouchables have to dwell outside the village and they can't use ordinary, undamaged pots. They aren't entitled to possess cattle, except dogs and donkeys, and are only permitted to wear the clothing of the dead as well as only allowed to walk barefooted. The jewelry of their women folk should be made of iron, and all their relationships are limited to only those who are similar to them. They also can't marry except from among themselves. Those laws – which still control the Hindu community today – say that if one of the Shudras speaks in matters of religion, boiling oil must be poured into his mouth!! Even worse, in the villages and rural areas the Untouchables are still banned from leaving their homes before nine in the morning and after three in the afternoon, because during these hours there shadows are long and the Brahmins are afraid of being touched by these shadows which are seen as being impure, as the Brahmin can't eat or drink until he washes himself clean from the impurity of the shadow of an untouchable!!

Michael: My word! Unbelievable! Does this really still happen in our time? And what is the percentage of these classes in the Indian society?

Rajiv: The Untouchables make up approximately 45% of the total population of India, i.e., 80% of the Hindus, while the other three classes make up 11% of the Hindus.

Yousef: But you said that the Indian government has banned using the title "Untouchables" since the late forties of the last century, and of course

these practices should be banned too by issuing a law against them.

Rajiv: That's right, but the problem is that there is the complex of viewing people as being racially pure or racially impure, and the distinction between human beings on this basis is one of the most basic principles of the Hindu religion, as they consider those who aren't Hindu, or don't belong to the top three classes, as being dirty and unclean humans.

Yousef: It seems to be a system based on oppression and abuse of humans, and discrimination on grounds that are not in the hands of man. But what is the relationship between that and the statement you've made that the problem has to do with the view of Islam.

Rajiv: Well, most of the untouchables, especially before the issuance of the ban I've mentioned, turned to Islam and not to any other religion, though they were living under the British Christian occupation, and although there were many missionaries who preached the Christian religion.

Yousef: Perhaps this is due to what they could feel and see of the respect Islam has for humans; since he who recognizes the reality of Islam and the human rights in it, and that it equates between the old and the young, and the rich and the poor, and also recognizes the freedoms granted to human beings, must be driven to this religion and to embracing it. I expect that they sensed that during their interaction with Muslims.

Michael (Sarcastically and rhetorically): And you want to tell us that Islam respects freedoms and human rights?! Freedoms and human rights weren't defined by any religion, but were laid down by Western philosophers and thinkers, and it was gained by the peoples through a long struggle against injustice and the violation of their rights, and the confiscation of freedoms… And those rights don't exist in Islam! Where is freedom of belief and the right of conversion from Islam, in Islam? Where is the freedom of expression? Where are women's rights? Do not let the zealousness of your faith in your religion be a cause to hide the truth!

Yousef: You've just opened a broad front for intellectual debate my friend, and I notice that you talk in a victorious, confident tone, as if the West has been elevated to become a model in relation to human rights. If the West has really reached such a condition, how do you explain the numerous convictions that took place against more than one thinker, writer and historian, just because they (expressed their opinion and) questioned the

Jewish Holocaust in denial of its existence or minimizing the number of its victims? Isn't that confiscation of the right of access to information and research, and freedom of thought, of opinion and of expression? Can one exercise his right to establish a Republican Party in monarchial Britain, or a Nazi party in Germany? In fact, can I, a Muslim, get officially married in Britain to a second wife, although my religion gives me the right to do so? Won't the authorities interfere to confiscate these rights and restrict these freedoms?

Michael: These freedoms and rights primarily conflict with human rights. They are settled, organized, and formulated in the form of laws and regulations to which all of us must adhere. Doubting the Holocaust involves anti-Semitism, which is a racist act that spreads hatred and goes against brotherhood and equality, which are constants and are sacred, and we can't just simply drift from them, even if it restricts other freedoms. The same can be said about prohibiting the formation of the parties that you've mentioned in these countries, and your marriage to a second wife does not fall under the right of freedom of belief, since it goes beyond the framework of personal emotion and conscience. Furthermore, it is a violation of the law and the social contract, and the system favored by most members of the community that you live in, because it is an infringement on the rights of other individuals (i.e. women, even if they consent to it). However, at the same time it is permissible for you, if you wish, to cohabite with other women out of wedlock, as long as it is consensual.

Yousef: Very beautiful...So, what I consider as being unjust and a confiscation of my rights and my freedom, you consider as a restraint and an arrangement that has no injustice in it! That's exactly what is being done by the Hindu clergy, the practices of whom our friend Rajiv have just mentioned and which we all considered as being horrendous. Do you think they consider what they do as being an impingement upon the rights of others? No, of course not!

Rajiv: (Confused) Your words seem to mean that they are right in their practices and their prejudiced class distinction.

Yousef: No my dear friend, absolutely not… My intention is to clarify that we cannot separate rights and freedoms from the value system that made them, nor from the general legislative framework which regulates

and organizes them. If we are to really review these rights and freedoms, we must closely examine the values and principles upon which they were founded, not the applications or the practices of people. If we agree to that, we shall find a substantial difference between the Islamic and the Western theory that is reflected in the areas of human rights and freedoms. This difference is mainly due to the difference in the perception of what a human is, the reality of rights and the meaning of freedom, within the holistic vision of man, the universe and life. This is what has just happened with my friend Michael, when he projected the concepts of religion, brotherhood and equality, according to the Western system of thought, on rights and freedoms, and made it a constant and sacred, while these concepts are different in Islam.

If we talk about the principle of human rights in Islam, we find that it has advanced to become a necessity guaranteed by the entire society which is based on religion. Islam has developed a framework of rights based on public decency, compassion and good manners, in addition to its legal system. In fact, rights in Islam are not limited to humans, but extend to animals too.

Michael: I did not imagine that animal have rights in your religion.

Yousef: Islam forbids the harming of animals unless they cause real harm, or present a real threat. It forbids killing animals for entertainment and game - as is the case when animals are used as an object for shooting or for fighting in competitions. Islam commands that animals may not be slaughtered except for food. Moreover, when a Muslim does slaughter an animal for food, he should not do that without the permission of his Creator and in His name, in the way that has been prescribed by Him. The etiquette followed in doing that takes into account the psychological state of the slaughtered animals too, which is something we don't find in the slaughter of human beings by others who deviate from the divine path. The knife should not be sharpened in front of the animal, and an animal shouldn't be slaughtered in front of another. Do you think that a religion that gives such rights to animals would be unjust to human beings in their rights?

Rajiv: I think that that matter should be discussed in further detail in another meeting.

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Human Rights in Islam

Human Rights in Islam

When Yousef started up his computer and entered the chat room, he found a message from Michael, saying, “Prepare yourself for the next meeting ... there are important issues we have to discuss: dealing with others, repression, freedom of thought…Goodbye...”

Yousef found his two companions inside the chat room. He greeted them, and then said:

Yousef: There are many issues related to human rights, and they are not limited to only what you mentioned, my friend Michael. This calls me to lay down a fully comprehensive framework, through which we will be able to understand the issues, no matter how different or divergent they may be.

Michael: I do not mind giving some examples; such as those I mentioned in my message to you; so that our talk can be practical and applicable.

Yousef: Of course, go ahead.

Rajiv: You mentioned in our previous meeting a rule that we can build on. This rule is that if we really want to review these rights and freedoms, we must examine the values and principles upon which they were built, and not the actual applications and practices of people.

Yousef: True...The concept of the values of freedoms and human rights are tinted with the intellectual background from which these rights come, and is subject to the general values system of the society from which they emerge. And here, I ask my friend Michael, is it possible to explain the Western intellectual background and values system upon which the Western concept of human rights was built?

Michael: We can present the features of the conceptual framework and the values space from which the rights and freedoms emerged in the West in the following points:

1. The abstract mind, as it is the reference of these rights and freedoms, even if this mind borrows some of the values from religion, as in the case of the influence of Liberalism by Protestantism - the abstract mind remains the governor of these values, according to what is accepted and rejected.
2. Secularism, or the separation of religion from daily life and the state, is the methodology in which these rights and freedoms are organized.

3. Freedom and equality are the highest values of society, which are subject to and rely on the other organized values of the community. They are constants and sacred, and can't be touched.
4. Raising the value of the individual and his interests, while not neglecting the role of the community and its interests, so as to achieve happiness and improve the individual's life.

Yousef: A clear and precise presentation, thank you. So, it is clear that the reference in the West, after its separation from the church in the areas of daily life, turned to the mind, as well as to the use of experiments. These rights and freedoms grew from this reference, and it's also clear that the methodology on which these rights and freedoms are established is secular.

We can also say that freedom and equality sit at the top of the pyramid of values which the West has accepted as being suitable (according to this reference). Realizing these two values, therefore - according to the concept which is accepted in the West - takes absolute priority over other values of the community, to which they should be subjected, with which they should comply and according to which they should be organized. From that, freedom and equality became the top sacred constants; which can't be touched, and for which, as well, other values and other rights may be sacrificed in order to maintain them.

This is what is totally different from the Islamic background and system that contains the same vocabulary or terminology.

Rajiv: So that we can compare, explain to us the intellectual framework and the area of values in which this term, human rights, orbit in Islam?

Yousef: In Islam and the Muslim community, there is quite a different system:

In place of the abstract mind and the use of experiments, revelation is the first reference of values and principles from which sacred constants are derived, while not neglecting the importance of knowledge gained by the mind and the senses, in their appropriate fields.

In place of secularism, Shari'ah, or Islamic legislation and the use of religion to organize the daily life is the methodology on which the community stands.

In place of freedom and equality, slavery to God and justice among humans sit at the top of the pyramid of values in the Muslim community

(and justice does not necessarily mean equality, as understood by some people). The achievement of these two values, and not compromising either of them, takes absolute priority, and other community values, including rights and freedoms, should be subjected to, abided by, and organized according to them.

And in place of individuality, we find in Islam mutual responsibility between the individual and society, and harmony between them, without one infringing on the other.

Rajiv: Perhaps we should apply these two views on some rights; to get a clearer picture.

Michael: We can determine the issue of the freedom of belief to compare between Islamic and Western views, based on the benefits that emanate from each system, one of such benefits being human rights.

Yousef: Freedom of belief, or freedom of religion, is already a fertile field for comparison; and the subject goes back to the difference in the concept of religion and its relationship with the pyramid of values in both systems.

In the West, any person may profess any religion, be an atheist or change his religion; because that is part of the right of freedom of belief, which is a personal/individual right, and no one is is allowed to interfere with it.

But, at the same time we see that for a Muslim in the West, we are able to assume that he can believe what he wants, but he still has no right to put this belief into practice. In other words, the West confiscates the right of a Muslim to practice his life according to his religion. In more than one country in the West, a Muslim is prevented from, for example, slaughtering animals according to Islamic legislation. He is also prohibited from getting married to a second wife, and in some countries it is forbidden for a Muslim woman to wear the clothing that she believes her religion makes obligatory upon her. These practices are considered by the Muslim as a part of his religion...Can you explain that to me?

Michael: Because this practice has gone out of the framework of personal emotions and conscience, and therefore goes beyond the right of freedom of belief, and because this is a violation of the law and the social contract, and of the system favored by most individuals, which provides for the separation of religion from the affairs of life.

But at the same time, I assure you that it is permissible for a Muslim, by law, to cohabite with other women outside of wedlock, as long as it is consensual and not on the marital bed.

Yousef: But this practice which is permitted by law is contrary to the religion in which he believes and to which he belongs.

But concerning the practices of belief I just have mentioned, of course, I understand that you do not consider these restrictions as a derogation of rights and freedoms, because you do not see, in the first place, that there is a relationship between these practices and religion. Rather, you consider this limitation and restriction as a way of protecting the civil gains your society has received, which have become sacred constants.

The reason for this is that this view of belief or religion is consistent with the Western secular view of religion, which separates religion from daily life; for religion, according to this system, has nothing to do with the community, but it is an emotion or personal conscience the person holds only within himself, and for that reason this emotion should be entirely separate from daily life, as you've already pointed out earlier.

Rajiv: Now I begin to understand the Islamic point of view.

Yousef: In the Islamic perception freedom of religion is guaranteed in the framework of taking into account the most important constant of this society, which is slavery and submission to God Almighty. Accordingly, the Muslim community accepts to have under its umbrella all those who announce their acceptance of the authority of God, in the general sense, and rejects all those who announce their rebellion against and violation of this authority. Hence, the Muslim community accommodates a multi-religious presence by accepting to co-exist with people who believe in Judaism and Christianity, allowing them to freely organize their personal affairs, while it has no room for other pagan religions or for atheism. This is because Judaism and Christianity are religions which have a heavenly origin and they announce their acceptance of being under the umbrella of slavery and submission to God, in the general sense.

But the deviation and distortion which those two religions have suffered, according to the religion of Islam - which clash with the constant fact of slavery to God - makes the circle of freedom of expression for them narrower than the circle of their freedom of belief. They are, therefore, not entitled to call others to their religion, have missionary activities, or

expose the signs of their worship that represent how they have deviated, outside the circle of those who believe in these two religions. This is because freedom of expression beyond this circle violates the social system and destroys the basic and sacred constant of the pyramid of values of the community.

Michael: What about Islam preventing its adherents from converting to another religion?

Yousef: This issue is also consistent with what I've just said. The issue of an apostate from Islam is related to the perception of freedom of belief, according to the Islamic perspective. Islam does not punish those who have not embraced it in the first place, and it does not force or compel anyone to convert and enter into it. Allah says in the chapter named Al-Baqarah, verse 256: {There is no compulsion in religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong.}. And in the chapter named Al-Kahf, verse 29, Allah says: {And say (O Muhammad), "The truth is from your Lord, so whoever wills - let him believe; and whoever wills - let him disbelieve."} Allah also says in the chapter named Al-Kaferoon: {For you is your religion, and for me is my religion.}… We also find that Islam, at the same time, punishes anyone who leaves it for another religion.

We can understand the position of Islam in relation to an apostate, given that this transition out of Islam is a challenge to the highest and the basic value on which the society is founded. In other words, it is considered as a declaration that challenges the validity of this religion, i.e. a declaration that humans don't need this religion, which is unacceptable in a society that derives its legitimacy and authority from its belief in the soundness and from its need of this very religion.

This is exactly the same as one – springing from a country that is built on freedoms - demands the demolition and destruction of the (sacred constant) of freedom. Automatically, the immediate reply of the supporters of freedom is to raise the known slogan 'no freedom for the enemies of freedom'; because this person will use freedom to kill freedom, i.e., the demolition of the highest value and the basis of the community.

Michael: Thank you Yousef for that clarification. I'm happy with these dialogues and I hope they will continue.

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One Moment Please!!

One Moment Please!!

Michael: We've been waiting for ten minutes now and Yousef still hasn't shown up ... that's strange!!

Rajiv: True, this will also affect our other appointments and engagements.

Shortly after that, Yousef entered the chat room, greeted his two friends, and then said:

Yousef: Sorry for the delay, I was held up by a couple of tasks that I had to attend to and really couldn't cancel.

Michael: Allow me, Mr. Yousef, to say that this is a general feature known about Arab and Islamic peoples. Time just has no value for you lot. Sorry if my frankness is harsh!

Yousef: Much of what you said is true. In fact, we are the ones who gave this bad idea about ourselves to others. But let me just correct the error of connecting such bad behavior with Islam.

Michael: If it doesn't come from Islam, then from where? I see that most people who are neglectful of time and scheduled appointments are citizens of your countries.

Yousef: There are two important differences between our people and your people: culture and environment. The fact is that it is the environment, and not Islam, that is responsible for this bad habit.

Rajiv: How is this true, when religion is supposed to be an important element in your culture?

Yousef: This is because of the fact that many contemporary Muslims do not adhere to the teachings of their religion, either because they are ignorant of these teachings or do not bother about them, and when religion and belief has less impact on a person, he tends to incline to the effect of the surrounding environment.

Michael: And what does the effect of the environment have to do with what we're speaking about?

Yousef: Let me explain to you. You, for instance, live in your country from ancient times in bitterly cold weather, and laws of survival necessitated that you must prepare yourself for the effects of such weather. So, you store food for the winter, and gather firewood or fuel in preparation for the cold weather. Your environment, therefore, forces you, even before thinking about or organizing anything, to adopt certain behaviors that are

accurate and that take into consideration the factor of time.

As for our countries, they are located in the temperate zone or the moderately warm zone, which is characterized by moderate weather in most seasons of the year, as well as the abundance of its crops and wealth. This, therefore, demands less effort from people in these countries, and less preparation and organization to sustain their life, and this, in its turn, has an effect on these people's behavior. They incline to be more lenient, or let's say: lazy and inactive - which is increased by the hot weather - and they don't feel, for that reason, that lack of precision or consideration of the time affects their survival.

Rajiv: There is no doubt that the environment has a strong impact on humans, and resisting that impact needs an even stronger influence. Then why didn't Islam change this negative impact of the environment? Was it because it didn't care about these matters, or because it was not able to do so?

Yousef: As for replying to your saying that Islam is not able to do so, this comprises many factors, and now is not a suitable time to discuss them but, generally speaking, Islam is able to organize the communities which adopted it as its reference, and also organize the lives of its adherents at any period of time, and there are great models in history in this area.

Michael: Will you please mention to us some of these models?

Yousef : There are several models, including:

The story related by Amara Bin Khuzaymah bin Thabit, when he heard Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab saying to his (Amara's) father, Khuzaymah: "What prevents you from planting your land?" His father said: "I am an old man and I will soon die." Omar said to him: "I insist that you must plant it." Amara then said: "I saw Omar planting the land with his own hands, with my father." And the companion of the Prophet (mercy and blessing of the highest degree be upon him), Abdullah bin Mas'ud, said: "I detest seeing a man sitting without working: not doing any work for this world or for the Hereafter." Abdul Rahman, the son of Imam Abu Hatim al-Razi, said about his father: "I used to read to him maybe all the time: while he was eating I read to him, while he was walking I read to him, while he was in the toilet I read to him, and when he entered into the house to get something I read to him."

Rajiv: But does Islam establish the importance of time in its teachings, to

remain a guide for those who follow it at any time?

Yousef: Yes, Islam underlines the importance of time in the Qur'an, and the traditions and sayings of the Prophet. He who considers the teachings of the Qur'an and the manner of the Prophet of Islam, and reads the biography of his companions and followers, will find with regards to time nothing but a clear indication to the importance of time and to punctuality in all circumstances. A manifestation of this is that Almighty God swears in His book more than once by time. He says: [By the dawn (1) And [by] ten nights (2)], and He says: [By the night when it covers (1) And [by] the day when it appears (2)]. He also says, [By time, (1)], and pointed out that from among His signs is the creation of the sun and the moon, in order to know the number of years and the account of time.

This is also seen in most Islamic acts of worship. All acts of worship depend on time, i.e. when they should start and when they should finish. In fact, the time specified for each act of worship is one of the conditions of its validity and acceptance. So Islamic law underlines the importance of this dimension, which is to have respect for and commitment to time, by making it a condition for the acceptance of those acts of worship. God says, for example: [Verily, the prayer is enjoined on the believers at fixed hours. (An-Nisa: 103)]. Prayer, which is the mainstay of the religion, divides day and night into parts of fixed times and clear signs. The same can be said about the other acts of worship or pillars of Islam. Fasting has a certain time annually, and during the time of fasting, a Muslim has to strictly stick to certain times with regards to eating or abstaining from eating. Also for Zakat (money given to the poor by the rich who fulfill certain conditions), as it is a socio-economic system subject to precise timings and specific estimations. The same is also true about pilgrimage.

Indications of the importance of time in the Sunnah of the Prophet are many. The Sunnah focuses on time, as does the Qur'an. The Prophet Muhammad highlighted the importance of punctuality, as indicated in his saying, "Muslims should be committed to their terms," as when a certain time for a meeting or an appointment is defined, it is a requirement of each individual to be committed to that time. If he isn't committed to that, then he has broken a promise that he had laid upon himself. The Prophet considered breaking a promise as one of the attributes of hypocrites. He said, "Signs of a hypocrite are three: when he speaks, he lies, when he promises, he breaks that promise, and when he is trusted with something,

he betrays that trust." Thus, the individual who is late or neglects his appointment because of carelessness and disregard, made a promise and then broke it.

Michael: But the importance of time is a value common to all cultures and civilizations, what did Islam add to this value?

Yousef: Islam added the value of the investment of time and its organization, in three major dimensions:

The First: Is the extent. Time is the most precious and valuable asset of the human being. It is his life. It can be neither brought forward, delayed nor increased, and if it is lost, there's no hope of its return. It's for that reason that Islam encourages the investment of time until the last moment possible – which is the end of a man's life. In fact, Islam even connects the fruits of time to after death and resurrection, and the reckoning on the Day of Judgment. Moreover, Islam urges Muslims to make the most of their time, even in the most difficult circumstances. The Messenger of Allah said, "Should the hour of the Day of Judgment arrive and one of you has a palm shoot in his hand, let him plant it, if he is able to."

The second dimension is the obligatory aspect. Islam made the value of the investment of time and its organization stem from the consideration that this organization and investment is not an option for a Muslim, but an obligation on him. This springs from the fact that his age, which is the time span of his work, isn't his exclusive property. In fact, time is a gift from the Lord to invest to obtain His satisfaction, as much as possible. Hence, Islam considers time to be a capital for which a human being will be held accountable for, with regards to how he spent and invested it. The Messenger of Allah said, "A servant of Allah will remain standing on the Day of Judgment until he is questioned: about his age and how he spent it..." The Messenger of Allah also said: "There are two blessings which many people lose: They are health and free time in order to do good." He said, "Take advantage of five matters before five other matters: Your youth before old age, your health before sickness, your wealth before poverty, your free time before being pre-occupied, and your life before death." There is no doubt that accountability increases if the capital increases. God says in the chapter named Fatir, verse 37: [Did We not allow you to live long enough for you to seek guidance?] The Prophet said, "Allah will not accept the excuse of any person whose instant of

death is delayed until he is sixty years of age." It was also narrated that Hasan al-Basri (may Allah have mercy on him) said, "Son of Adam, you are but days, whenever a day passes, a part of you is lost with it."… This day is also divided into hours, minutes and seconds. Whenever a minute goes by, or even a second, a part of you is lost; time is life.

The third dimension is the motive and the reward for this value. Time is an external variable, and no one other than the individual himself has authority or control over how he uses it. This is the reason why Islam makes internal motivation of the individual Muslim transcend and exceed any materialistic incentives and motives. Here comes the importance of self-control (the conscience) as being a key factor to set the minimum acceptable level of self-denial and benevolence towards the society. Self-control, in Islam, is based on the fear of the reckoning and of the Creator, and based on desiring His reward. This calls a Muslim to spend his time in what benefits the individual and the nation.

Michael: This is a strange religion! It intervenes in all affairs of the human life, and leaves no options for a person, even in his private life.

Yousef: No, it does leave space for diversity and for human options, but it doesn't leave an opportunity for other methodologies to compete with it, except through its system, This is consistent with the Islamic vision of man, the universe and of life, some of the aspects of which I have formerly clarified.

Islam considers the value of time not only in terms of material investment that is part of the fields of administration or economy, but its view also transcends and goes far beyond that. Man, from the Islamic point of view, before being a worker or a producer in worldly or material areas, is a submissive Muslim, who fears the punishment of God and hopes for His reward, and considers Him in all his words and his actions. Investing time and organizing it in Islam doesn't refer to an abstract idea in itself, aiming at exploiting time that in turn leads to an increase in profit and production. In fact, investing time is more sublime than that, because it is a spiritual goal that stems from the fear of the Day of Resurrection, the day of being held accountable and punished.

Rajiv: I have other issues to talk about concerning the behavior of some Muslims, but I'd prefer to postpone it to a later meeting...see you both later.

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Allow Me!!

Allow Me!!

Yousef sat waiting, prepared at his laptop ahead of the meeting that was scheduled by the trio. Michael and Rajiv arrived shortly one after the other, and after an exchange of greetings, Yousef said:

Yousef: Rajiv, you mentioned in our previous dialogue that you had some other things you wanted to mention in relation to the behavior of some Muslims, other than the subject of punctuality.

Rajiv: Yes, it is well known that your disregard for rules of conduct when dealing with others isn't limited to appointments only, but extends to having appropriate behavior with others as well.

Yousef: How so? Did you notice that I behaved badly, or that I exceeded acceptable limits in the way I dealt with you?!

Rajiv: No, no…Sorry, I didn't mean you personally; I meant that it appears, generally speaking, that this is the case. Let me give you an example of what I mean. Once, during my visit to a restaurant, I saw a sign posted on the entrance door that said: "Dogs and Arabs not allowed!" I went and spoke with the restaurant owner about it, because I didn't like what I saw, and asked him what his reason was for putting up that sign...it is true that he seemed proud and arrogant in his appearance and behavior, but he gave me quite good reasons to justify his action. He said that his restaurant was upper class and was often frequented by princes, ministers and people of prominence, and it so happened that his restaurant had been frequented by a group of young Arabs that displayed crude behavior that was detrimental to the restaurant as well as its patrons. He explained further and gave me the following as justifications for his action:

- They moved the tables as they desired, regardless of the staff's objections, which caused chaos and discomfort in the restaurant.
- Brawling erupted among them and they started arguing in a loud tone.
- Some of them dipped their hands into their dishes in an offensive way, raising the abhorrence of others.
- Some of them even had the audacity to scratch their backs with a fork or a knife.

He said that he lost many of his prominent customers because of their shameful behavior, so he decided to put an end to this by preventing all

Arabs from being entertained at his restaurant in the future.

Yousef: I could imagine that much of what you've said is true, but as I've mentioned before, we have done a great disservice to ourselves with our bad behavior, and have painted the wrong picture about ourselves...I must however stress the error in relating these bad mannerisms with Islam.

Michael: Will you then also attribute this behavior to the influence of the environment?!

Yousef: Indeed, I can't ignore the impact of the environment, but I will add to it the wrong upbringing of such youth.

Michael: I understand the impact of the wrong upbringing part, but I do not understand how the impact of the environment affects it!

Yousef: I'll provide you with an example in order to help you understand this effect better. You, for instance, live in a country known to be located in the chilly and severely cold zone of the globe, where the winter is long and its cold is biting, with a lot of rain, snow and icy winds. Man can't live in such weather without preparing for these conditions and taking the necessary precautions to face them. It is therefore necessary, for example, to plan houses and facilities in a manner that takes these conditions into consideration. When the plans are implemented, work must be perfected and completed with absolute accuracy. Roofs and windows, for example, must be installed very carefully so as not to let in cold water or air, and these circumstances must also be taken into account when installing adequate heating systems and one has to prepare for such conditions by making heating fuels available. All of this produces a type of conduct which exhibts precision, discipline and planning.

On the contrary in our countries, where such harsh climatic conditions do not occur, one doesn't feel there is any need to behave in such a way in order to survive. If one is left to the influence of this environment, chaos will become the characteristic of the lives of many. Do not forget that our environment, which is mostly desert, is a hard and dry environment, characteristics which may also be transmitted to the people's feelings, making them hard and dry too.

Rajiv: Do we then leave such a man to wander here and there, being only subject to his natural environment, without any discipline or organization of his life, and allow him to live in that chaotic state without showing him

the correct way to deal with other people?

Yousef: No, not at all, but I explained to you the reason for this way of thinking to enable you to recognize the real cause of this phenomena that we see.

Rajiv: If we find a difference between western, and eastern or Islamic nations, where the environment or climate is concerned, we also find a difference in the religion which is dominant in these nations; so why wouldn't it then be that Islam is also part of the cause of these phenomena that we are talking about?

Yousef: Islam organizes the life of a Muslim and his time in order to make his existence busy with the worship of God Almighty, according to the broad meaning of worship that I've already made clear to you. And many may not know that most theories of how to behavior appropriately with others, and by that I mean etiquettes, prove that this art goes back to the religion of Islam, which the Muslims brought to Andalusia. After the fall of Andalusia, this science was taken from the Muslims and many countries paid much attention it, including France, Spain and Britain. They developed it, added other details to it, and organized it until it reached us in its current form.

Michael (Laughing): You Muslims, your excessive fanaticism towards your religion make you attribute anything good to it. I won't ask you to prove this claim to me, because I know that it would need a lengthy search to do that, but I only ask you to prove to me that these rules are found in Islam.

Yousef: Islam rectified the conduct of the individual and his behavior in all walks of life. There are many laws in the Qur'an and Sunnah that can be classified in the field of etiquettes in dealing with others.

Michael: This is in general, my friend. But please provide examples to give credibility to what you've just said.

Yousef: Indeed, I shall provide you with some examples in order to clarify my point. Let's consider, for example, how the Prophet of Islam dealt with his wife and children:

If we see a man opening the car door for his wife, we describe him as a complete gentleman, but when mounting a camel, the Messenger of Allah, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, would sit on the ground, extend his hand, and then ask his wife to stand on his leg in

order to reach the saddle.

The Prophet used to deal with his wives, children and servants mercifully and with patience, and was forgiving to his transgressors. Once the Prophet was prostrating on the ground while leading the Muslims in prayers, and one of his young grandchildren playfully jumped on his back. The Prophet didn't move until the little one got off his back, to make sure the child would not fall.

Islam calls for gentleness and humility. The Messenger of Islam had these characteristics, and although he, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, was a highly respected Prophet among his companions and was the head of the state, he was very humble. The Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, was so modest with his servants that he used to wash his own clothes. He never overburdened his servants with what they couldn't do. In fact he used to help them if they needed it. He was compassionate in his gestures, even with non-Muslims. Once a funeral procession of a Jew passed by him, so he stood up for it. When those around him showed that his actions surprised them, he explained to them that the sanctity of death is the same for all people.

Indeed, Islam links how a human walks with his behavior and morals. The Qur'an determines the morals for walking, which is to neither raise the head up so much that one appears haughty, nor to lower and bend it so one appears servile. God says {And do not turn your face away from men with pride, nor walk in insolence through the earth. Indeed, Allah likes not each arrogant boaster¯And be moderate (or show no insolence) in your walking, and lower your voice…}

Rajiv: Then, if I meet the owner of this restaurant, can I convey to him a different picture to what he saw from the actions of these young people?

Yousef: I shall mention to you some Islamic manners that relate to what you've just mentioned about the bad practices of these young people and others in such a place, or any other place:

Of these manners is that Islam orders us to greet others, and urges us to spread the greeting of peace in the society. Islam stresses that this greeting causes love, and it makes replying to that greeting a religious obligation; not just a social behavior. Islam also forbids us to greet others while eating if the mouth is full of food, or to greet those who are falling asleep. And Islam also emphasizes that voices should be lowered if there

are people who are asleep.

The Qur'an calls on Muslims to avoid raising their voices unnecessarily: {…and lower your voice; indeed, the most disagreeable of sounds is the voice of donkeys.) In fact, the Qur'an describes the one in the street who yells to his friend inside his home as being unreasonable {Verily! Those who call you from behind the dwellings, most of them have no sense.} Moreover, the Prophet, mercy and blessings be upon him, never yelled at anyone and he never raised his voice.

Islam calls for cleanliness constantly and everywhere: while sitting with friends or family, while eating, at home or outside of the home. Islam set rules of etiquette for eating and drinking; and when spoons, forks and dishes hadn't been invented yet, the Prophet, mercy and blessings be upon him, forbade Muslims from eating with more than three fingers, and from letting the hand wander freely over the plate. Instead he taught us to eat from that which is closest to us. One also shouldn't drink a glass of water all at once, in one gulp, but he should begin by taking three sips, breathing outside of the glass between each sip. Another etiquette is that a Muslim shouldn't eat until his stomach is full of food and drink, but rather he should leave one third for food, one third for drink, and one third for air. Moreover, Islam takes into account the social and emotional dimensions that can grow during meal-times, and makes eating in company a doorway for harmony and affection between the members of the society. It even urges Muslims to converse with the guest during meals, so that he doesn't feel ashamed or estranged while eating. The Prophet of Islam, mercy and blessings be upon him, used to feed his wife with his own hand, and he said, "The best charity is a bite that a man puts into the mouth of his wife." He, mercy and blessings be upon him, used to drink from the same spot on the cup as his wife Aisha, may God be pleased with her, where her lips had been. Islam also links eating and worship to God Almighty, by ordering us to mention God's name before eating, and praise Him after finishing.

Michael: Allow me to tell you, Yousef, that there is a big difference between your religion and your manners, and that we are closer to the teachings of your religion in this area than you are.

Yousef: Unfortunately, that might be quite true.

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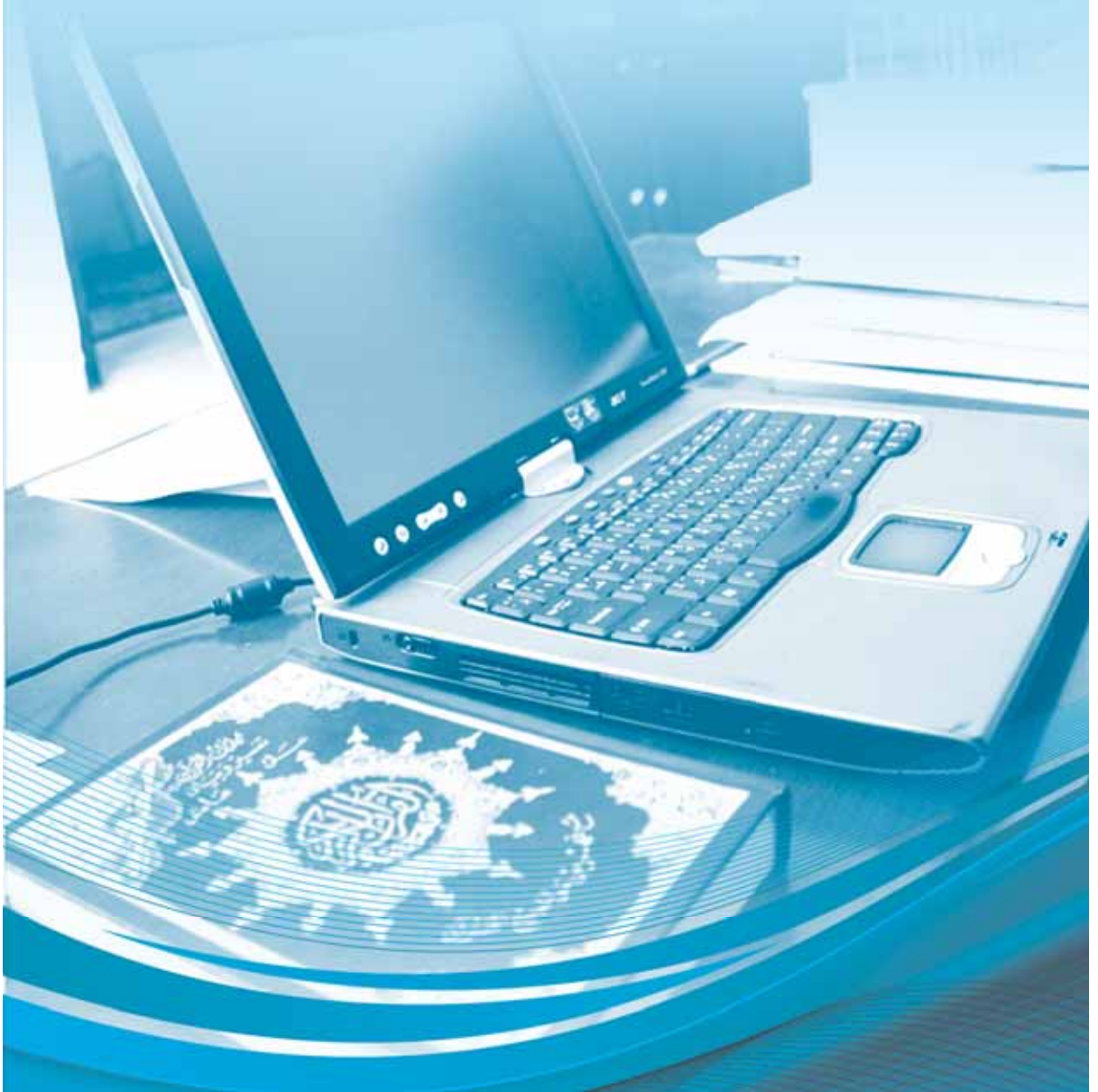
Ethics of the Qur'an



Ethics of the Qur'an

Rajiv began the discussion by saying to Michael and Yousef:

Rajiv: Our previous conversation concerning the behavior of some Muslims has led us to discuss ethics in Islam. Do you think that this topic is worth discussing?

Michael: Yes, definitely! I'm surprised by some Muslims, as I see on one side they have a high degree of noble ethics, and on the other, some of their morals do not fit in with the first image.

Yousef: Allow me to elaborate Mr. Michael, this is due to two factors: Firstly, your own perspective of ethics, and secondly, the extent to which they themselves really adhere to, or express, a certain ethical system, because personal morals also clearly show the effect of the environment and upbringing, in addition to inherited factors. This was referred to by the Prophet of Islam, and has been proved by experience and scientific research.

Rajiv: Would you please explain this reference?

Yousef: This reference is derived from two hadeeth of the Prophet [May the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him]. Firstly, addressing one of his companions, the Prophet said, "You possess two characteristics which Allah and His Messenger love: forbearance and deliberateness." The companion asked him, "O Messenger of Allah, did I acquire these characteristics, or did Allah create them in me?" he replied, "No, Allah created them in you." In this Hadeeth it is confirmed that forbearance and deliberateness could be part of the genetic characteristics of a person, i.e. created in his genes. In another Hadeeth, the Messenger of Allah [May the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him] said, "Knowledge is acquired through learning, and forbearance is achieved through practicing it. Whoever seeks good will be offered good, and whoever fears evil will be saved from it." In this Hadeeth the Messenger [May the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him] proves that the characteristic of forbearance (which was genetic in the case of the former companion) can be acquired. This, of course, could be achieved through up-bringing, in which the society also plays a part.

Michael: This leads us to a deep multi-detailed philosophical study, but

regardless of this philosophical issue, I would first like to state that the ethical sense in humans is an innate sense that urges them to love some characteristics and hate others. This is clear as though the system of ethics may vary and be of different degrees in different individuals, yet the general feeling of humanity, at any period of time and regardless of the individuals considered, still regards some moral traits as being good and some others as being bad. Truthfulness, honesty, justice, and keeping promises for example, are all considered as being praiseworthy and commendable moral characteristics, no matter what role one has in life. On the other hand, humanity still, up until now, regards lying, injustice, treachery and treason as bad characteristics… and in the same way consolation, mercifulness, magnanimity, generosity and intolerance are regarded as being good.

Thus, can we say that Islam differs from the rest of humanity concerning these points? Furthermore can one claim that Islam has a moral system that is independent and distinct from other systems?

Yousef: With some reservation I have about acknowledging the truth of what you have mentioned, and reservation about the reality of the content of moral virtues and shortcomings that you have mentioned, I add to what you've said that even if the matter is so, yet different moral systems have been established, not only in Islam, but in all religions and social man-made systems, because they differed in determining the criterion of what is good and what is bad with regards to ethics and the means of knowing good from evil. They also do not agree in acknowledging the effective force that works behind the law and works in making people keep to it. The reason for this difference lies in the different view of the universe and the criterion taken (to judge what is good and bad) in all frameworks in which man may find himself in this universe, and the aim of man's life in that universe.

For example, many ethical theories take selfishness as their basis. In Renaissance Europe both Hobbes and Spinoza concluded, in different ways, that the conservation of self-survival is where good lies. Freud also, from his early writings, introduced a theory which continues to form the behavior of many Westerners, and is completely dominated by the concept of self-gratification. It has even been considered as being the basic primary concept when compared to other psychological concepts,

while altruism and good deeds were considered as secondary phenomena that obtain all the effect they have from their link to the various forms of self-gratification.

On the opposite side of these individual morals, stand the principles that are related to the group and community. These kind of morals adopt theories that emphasize the importance of the group, rather than stress that of the individual.

Michael: If we say that Islam indeed has a moral system that is distinct from that of the other systems, then on what basis does that system stand? And what are its traits and characteristics?

Yousef: As I've mentioned in previous dialogues, Islam is a way of life, a realistic human life in all its areas, because it is an approach that includes a doctrinal view that explains the nature of existence and identifies the place of man in this existence, and also determines the aim of human existence. Furthermore it is an approach that includes realistic systems and arrangements that emerge from that view and makes a realistic picture that is represented in the human beings way of life, involving the moral system and what springs from it, the foundations on which it stands, and the authority from which it is derived. It also involves the political system, with its form and characteristics, and the social order, with its foundation and components. The economic system, its philosophy and forms, and also the international system, its relationships and connections also play a part in this way of life...

This is expressed by Dr. M.H. Durrani, who served as a priest in the Church of England for a long period of his life. He wrote:

"Islam has a system, law and morality altogether, for religious rituals which are made obligatory on persons have an ethical goal. They aim at regulating the individual morally and spiritually in a reasonable manner, and also aim at cleansing and purifying his mind as well as strengthening it, in order to perform his duties towards others who live with him. Islam is the only religion that does not theoretically and practically require from a person to believe in lifeless principles and mysterious secrets, as is the case in the Christian religion. Islam accepts the spiritual and the material aspects of life alike and puts each in its place, and it establishes its philosophy on a basis that covers all aspects of human behavior."

Rajiv: If we consider that to be the basis upon which the ethical system

of Islam is established, then it is important to mention the characteristics of this system and what most distinguishes it from that of other systems.

Yousef: The characteristics of the Islamic ethical system can be summarized as follows:

Doctrinal basis: Which is that humans are creatures who are subservient to a Supreme Creator, a Creator Who know what is best for them and what benefits them most, and Who did not leave them to live aimlessly, rather He sent them messengers to inform them of His commands and way of life. Moreover, these humans will be resurrected after death for another life, to be held accountable for what they did, good or evil, in their worldly life. This is contrary to morality in the modern West, which is separated from religion by the separation of science and life from the Church.

Stability: Islamic morality expresses fixed principles and values derived from fixed bases and perceptions of man, life and the universe, addressed to a human whose reality and essence does not change over the years, even if conditions of life and facts of events around him change. Truthfulness, honesty and forbearance will remain as noble virtues, forever. Lying, backbiting and gossip will remain as vices forever. Homosexuality, which is not a natural way of life, will remain abnormal, and its reality will not change because it has spread among people or because some governments have legalized it, no matter how the pattern of people's lives change or alter.

Idealism with realism: If Islamic ethics are described as being idealistic by some of those who do not understand it, yet the reality of these ethics is that they are idealistic and realistic at the same time, and they take into their account the reality of human beings and their capacities, so everyone can apply and be consistent in them. This system of ethics maintains the life of the individual as an elevated creature, and it makes his life continue without encountering any pitfalls or obstacles. This is a system of ethics that does not conflict with nor is incompatible with human nature. Rather it is a system that integrates and is consistent with that nature. The Islamic view includes both the legislative side of life, which is stressed in Judaism, and the spiritual side which Christianity stresses. This is what the Indian writer Peggy Raderik indicated when he wrote:

“The moral teachings of Islam achieve a complete mixture between idealism and realism. One can, by virtue of these teachings, become acquainted with God and become a holy man while he is still engrossed in his daily life affairs...”

Commitment: It means that one pledges that he will adhere to such ethics in front of all humanity, based on the fact that the human has responsibilities he has to fulfill in this life. He has a message which Allah has entrusted him with, and he has a free will that governs his work and according to which he will be held accountable. Moral obligations are, therefore, the most prominent aspect of individual responsibility.

Responsibility: A human can never be of good moral conduct unless he has generated a sense of responsibility, and responsibility here means the acknowledgment of his own acts and his willingness to bear the consequences of his obligations, decisions and choices, positively or negatively, before Allah and before his own conscience and his community.

Connected to responsibility are the limits of that responsibility. In Islam this can be a personal, individual responsibility limited to only the individual who it concerns or who is to be held accountable for the act. It is can also be a social responsibility if more than one person participates in the act or decision. There is also a mutual responsibility between the individual and society, however, it has been ordained that one person does not bear the consequences of the actions or decisions of another.

Development of internal restraint and linking ethics with the general social order: Man forms his inner world, and from this world the real restraint for any moral obligation is generated. Islam has worked on the development of this restraint by emphasizing what is known as the intention, which is to have an internal aim which is specific, virtuous and permissible, pertaining to the act, before actually performing it. However, Islam does recognize that man is not perfect or infallible, and that he sometimes has his moments of weakness that also affect those around him. Islam thus does not leave the human to his internal conscience, rather it supports the individual’s commitment to ethical principles it identified by setting a set of social, legal and otherworldly deterrents and punishments for those who deviate from these principles.

Rajiv: Indeed, this is a system which is worthy of reflection and respect.

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An Islamic State...A Human Need

An Islamic State...A Human Need

When the three friends began their meeting, Michael and Rajiv noticed the presence of some sounds interfering with Yousef's voice. When they asked him what the noise was that was causing the interference, he told them that it came from the news on TV and asked them to give him a few minutes until it ended. Shortly after, Yousef hastily said:

Yousef: I must apologize, so please forgive me. I'm sure you folks realize the importance of listening to the news these days, especially for me! Are you following what is happening in my country these days?

Rajiv: Yes, it is exciting news. The events are occurring very rapidly and successively.

Michael: Perhaps the most prominent event that caught my attention is the rise of the so-called Islamists and their attempt to transform the state system to an Islamic one... It's rather annoying.

Yousef: And what's so annoying about it?

Michael: Humanity has already experienced the era of religious states, and it has been proven to be useless. It was a bitter experience to say the least. The epoch of religious states has been over since the Middle Ages.

Yousef: But what do you mean by the religious state, could you please explain this to me?

Michael: It's the state where the ruling class is of clerics, who claim to speak in the name of God. One of the most prominent risks in a religious state is that it confiscates the truth, in the name of God. This is due to the fact that they claim to speak in the name of God and attribute the quality of infallibility and holiness to themselves. Then the claim of rulers follows; that any objection against them is an objection against God, and they aren't called to account nor questioned about their actions.

Yousef: Unfortunately, there is a cultural confusion that has caused this misconception about an Islamic state. I agree with you about rejecting the form of state that you've just mentioned, the so-called theocracy. Theocracy, however, is a system of government that derives its influence and power (not just its legislation and regulations) from religion. If Europe

had suffered from this system of being governed by the church in the Middle Ages, Islam did not know this form of state and certainly does not approve of it. There is no rule which is legislated by the clerics in Islam, but rather these rules are applied by human beings who sometimes err and may even cause harm, and they are held accountable and punished for this or dismissed if necessary. The important difference here is that the reference for the Islamic state is Islam, and it is applied by human beings to whom no holiness is attached. There is no ruler in Islam who claims that he derives his legitimacy and authority from divine authority, rather he must be delegated by the nation to rule that nation.

In addition to that, the experience of the Islamic world in relation to the Islamic state was a successful experience, resulting in a prosperous and advanced state in its time; unlike the experience of the religious state in Europe.

Rajiv: Now we know the difference between the Islamic state and the religious state, but what is the difference between the Islamic state and the non-religious state?

Yousef: There are significant and substantial differences. What I'm concerned about here though, is the basis of the difference which lies between the Islamic and the secular concept of the universe, life and human beings. The system of the state in Islam stems from an Islamic perspective in which there is consistency between religion and life, and forms an integrated system in which a Muslim lives, and in which the roles of the individual, the nation and the state all integrate with each other.

In order to achieve this integration, we have to understand what our true place in the kingdom of God is. And If we admit that it is God who created us, it is natural that we shouldn't have any problem with doing what pleases Him. Furthermore if we admit that this earth and the heavens are His property alone, we should recognize that it is not right to implement except what He wills in His kingdom. And if we admit that God alone is the one who supports us, and He alone blesses us with sustenance, surely we shall come to know that our only position is to worship Him. If God is our ruler and the ruler of all that is in this world, there is no real place for us in this worl but to be in full obedience and

submission to Him.

Michael: But, what forces us to again put into practice an experience that has adversities and points of objections connected to it?! Human beings can decide for themselves how to live, what brings happiness to them, and what is the appropriate way to organize their lives, then after that there is nothing that stops them from correcting themselves and developing their experiences.

Yousef: The truth of the matter lies in the question: Is man eligible to rule or legislate or be the one who lays down the rulings? We know that if someone attempts to operate a device which he doesn't know anything about, he will damage it. For example, if one drives a car but he doesn't know how to drive, we know what inevitably will be the consequence of this recklessness. If we consider that this is the case for a small machine made of iron, which is impossible to run without the correct knowledge, then how will it be possible for people, who have many complex aspects and issues in their lives, as well as dealings that have countless aspects, with a multitude of obstacles and dilemmas, people who don't know anything about themselves, let alone others, how can they be able to operate this complex human system by themselves?

Another issue is that there is no way for justice to prevail except if the one who takes the responsibility of laying down the system of life for humans views all humans as being equal members of humanity. Only he who is above all personal interests and doesn't seek any gains from any specific individual, family, class, nation or country, only he is able to decide the rights due to all of them. Justice can never be established on earth except through this way.

Moreover, man is never free from personal purposes and self-interests. This human weakness is inherent in every human being. Just consider political leaders, religious leaders of the Brahmins, popes, heads of misguided Sufi groups, people with power and money, and you'll find that they forcibly single out special rights and privileges for themselves. Consequently, all that is under their authority and their influence concerning laws and legislations gives them rights which aren't afforded to the general public. They twist and turn these laws and legislations to serve their best interests, in various ways, and make people through

the media imagine that this is how things should be. Taking all that into consideration, is it then possible to establish the foundations of a just state and a balanced society in a society dominated by such people?!

Concerning the powerful nations which have enslaved other nations through the use of their powers, which law or system enforced by such powerful nations doesn't have selfishness running in its veins? Would it be possible that such people are able to found humane systems and legislations based on principles of rights and justice?

Rajiv: But, Mr. Yousef, what do you do in a state where religious minorities who believe in other religions besides Islam live? We in India, for example, have hundreds of religious minorities. When you make Islam the reference of legislation in the state, you force these minorities to accept a religion other than their own.

Yousef: It's good that you reminded me of this matter! There are three points I would like to make clear in this regard:

First, I'm surprised that you object to a non-Muslim living under the authority of an Islamic state despite the fact that his religion does not have a particular legislation that has to be established, (i.e. he is not asked to act differently from what his religion dictates) …but you force a Muslim to obey regulations contrary to his religion and to accept the legislations that violate his faith when living in a secular state, even though his religion clearly does not allow him to perform these acts!!

The second point is that making Islamic legislation the reference in the state doesn't mean non-Muslims are forced to embrace Islam; but in fact this is an objection which can be made against secular systems, as they force religion to be limited to only personal beliefs and emotional feelings, although Islam is not limited to such a realm. Islam for Muslims is comprised of rituals and legislations (i.e. a system and law) and a civilizational reference. As for the non-Muslim (which has no set legislation which he has to follow), he can consider Islam as a civilizational reference and submit to its regulations and laws, without becoming involved with any of its beliefs and rituals, just as you advocate the possibility of applying liberalism or socialism in societies where these systems didn't arise, and on adherents of different religions and sects.

Thirdly, that the establishment of a state with an Islamic reference does not mean that the rights of minorities are forgotten or that they are

oppressed, or that rulers intervene in the regulations of the minorities' own religions. Islam guarantees the rights of minorities and does not mind that they resort to their own religions concerning their personal matters.

Michael: But we now live in an era different from that in which Islam emerged and in which the experience of its state was applied, and if these efforts were successful they would be considered as a step backwards. A backward step! You want from us to restrain our thoughts and to stop at conditions that are no longer acceptable today, nor are logical to the new way of life!

You, for instance, still insist on the prohibition of usury, which is an economic necessity that is indispensable in any modern state.

Yousef: My friend, what you've said in this example and in other examples are based on axioms which are not true, and which are formed by a specific perception about the form of the state and the global system which we live in, after it forcefully imposed itself on us as a fait accompli. It also neglects the many negative effects from which humanity suffered after coupling the economic system with usury.

It is true that Islam prohibits usury, but it is not true that usury is an economic necessity.

Prominent capitalists and monopolists of the world advocate usury. They mislead the world by presenting it as a necessary need, while it is in fact a need only in their world of capitalism. However, prominent economists in the capitalist West condemn the system of usury and say that it will inevitable lead, over the generations, to the occurrence of economic and financial crises and the subsequent social problems, because of the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small group of people and of gradually denying it to the public. And we only have to look at the recent mortgage debt crisis and the subsequent disasters and international crises, and before that many crises of which the most famous is the Great Depression in the thirties of the last century... to realize the magnitude of the tragedy.

One of the miracles of the Islamic system is that it had forbidden usury and monopoly – the two pillars of capitalism – even before the advent of capitalism by nearly a thousand years. My dear friend, the Islamic state is not only an Islamic legislative necessity, but it is also a necessity for mankind.

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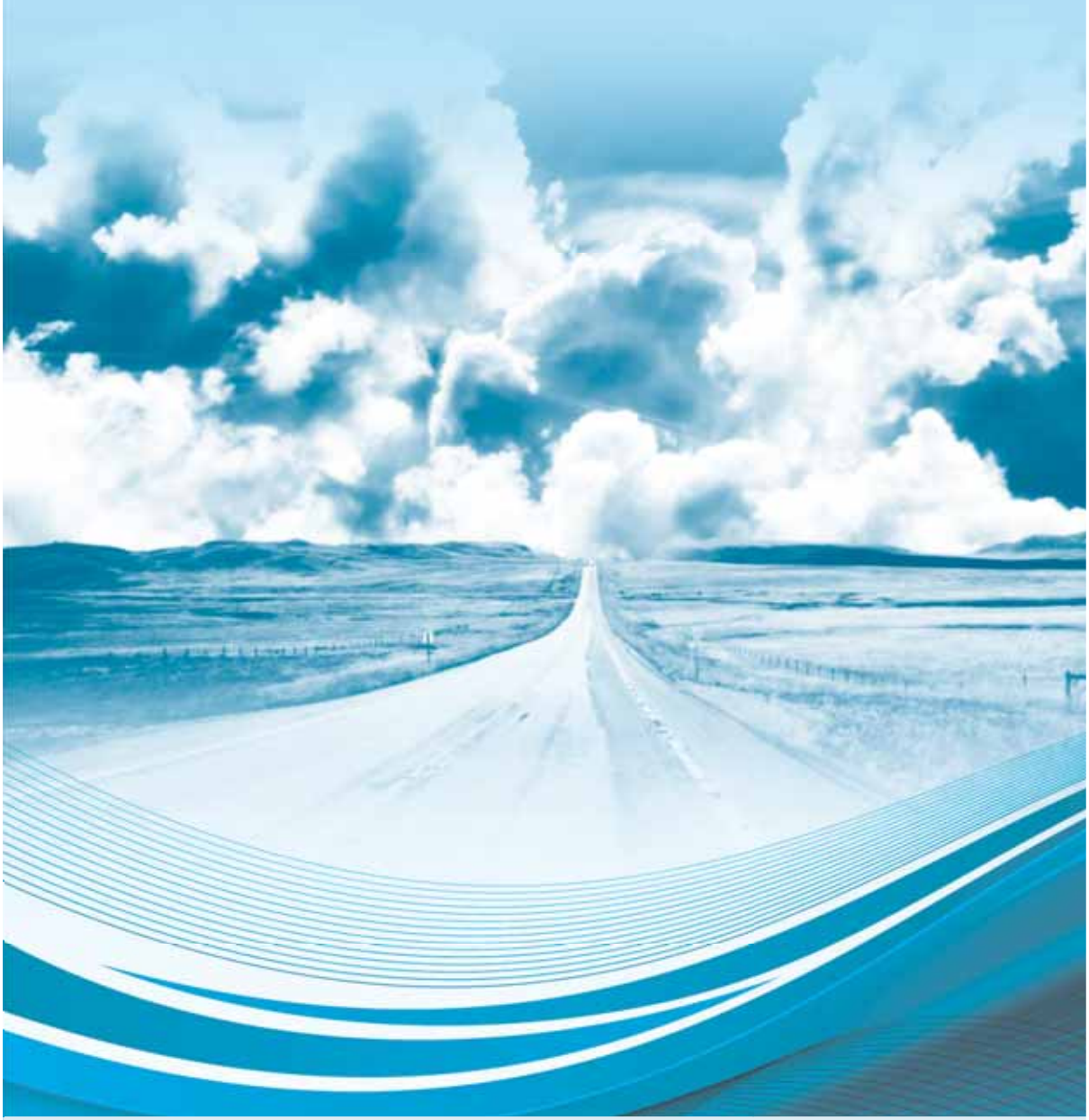
Eternal Journey



Eternal Journey

Michael greeted his two friends as soon as he had signed into the chat room. Rajiv greeted him back, while Yousef responded by saying:

Yousef: Wait for me a little, I am preparing a very exciting video for you both. Have you watched the video of the Italian football player Morosini, who played in the Livorno team in its match in Serie B with the Pescara club? He suddenly died after having cardiac arrest and collapsed to the ground. It was a complete and utter shock to the spectators as they saw him dying and his heart stopping after he was blazing with action, before their very own eyes!

Michael: Even more impressing was what happened when the Bolton team player Muamba fell during the match between his team and Tottenham in the FA Cup. The player fainted after he was struck with heart failure, and all claimed he was dead. However, in an extremely rare incident, his heart started beating again after it had stopped for 78 minutes!! This was what several doctors considered as death for 78 minutes, and it prompted Tobin, the team doctor, to exclaim, “He (Muamba) was, in effect, clinically dead at that time. We all feared for the worst and didn’t think we’d witness the recovery we saw. It’s simply incredible.” Muamba died and then came back to life.

Yousef: Death is the only truth that is recognized and agreed upon by all human beings. But, what comes after death? Is it the end, or is there another start after death - The Last Day, as many people believe?

Rajiv: Faith in the Last Day is an inherent doctrine that has been carried by humans since the beginning of life on this earth. Archeological discoveries and historical evidences have shown that this doctrine existed in ancient civilizations. It was known to the ancient Egyptians, to the Mayans and to the Romans in Mesopotamia... and to others... In addition, no heavenly revealed religion has been without this doctrine, and even human made religions such as Brahmanism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism and Sabianism believe in it too.

Yousef: It is true what you say, and this doctrine the Prophet of Islam called on us to believe in, and it was also conveyed by other prophets

to their people, and believing in it is one of the conditions of Islam at all times, for there is no meaning of faith in Allah and His books and His messengers without this doctrine.

Michael: However, I notice that the effect of this doctrine in people's lives is not the same, and only a few of them have a place for it in their consciousness, or consider it in their behavior.

Yousef: That's right; people all admit it at the level of theoretical belief, but few of them actually put that belief into practice, and the evidence for this is that if we imagine that a siren sounds to announce an air raid during the days of war, the expected norm is that the streets would empty quickly and be free of pedestrians and traffic, and he who does not run for shelter will be described as being foolish or crazy. If that is the case in relation to a small matter in this world, then how should it be if the matter was even more dangerous and much more important!? It is a danger that people believe will inevitably happen, and the Almighty, the Creator of this universe, warned us about it, and He announced it on the lips of all His apostles. It is logical then that people's response to this Divine warning should be stronger and more intense.

Michael: I think that the reason for this is that the people can physically see and hear the danger that the siren is sounded for. Even if they haven't experienced war, they have seen it in other cases, or in other places, or they may have observed its effects. As for the Last Day, the wall of death stands between it and us, and it is not apparent to our eyes today. This is what creates the difference in certainty between the two cases.

Yousef: Yes, it's true what you say, but it is assumed that humans reach facts and are certain of them through their minds too, not only through their senses. The reason for the weakness of certainty in these people is that they do not use the eye of their minds, for if they look at the matter carefully and used their minds well to understand it properly, they would realize that what they see with their own eyes is not more certain than what is absent from their view.

Moreover, there are things that if one waits to see or test, will perish; because these things cannot be experienced except once. If someone, for instance, were to challenge another by saying that he could throw himself from the top of a high building and fall unharmed, and the other

were to say that they should try it, then that would be their first and last experiment. It is not by such an experiment that one can prove the validity or incorrectness of this claim, but it is with the realization of the mind and by looking at previous cases and similarities that we can reach the expected outcome of the experiment - without actually going through it.

Rajiv: So, we need to reach this certainty, to prove this doctrine with mental evidence and with scientific parallels.

Yousef: I do not mind that, but I say that the strongest evidence in this case is the confidence in the truthfulness of He who told us so, Who is Allah, on the lips of His messengers, and this is what is required of us to believe in, in order have faith in Him. He knows best and He is most careful in guiding us to what is best for us.

As for what you have requested as mental evidence and scientific parallels, they are many... but I'll mention only some, as follows:

The first argument: Is that he, who is able to start something, is able to do it for a second, third, fourth or even fifth time. This means that if we were certain that Allah created us the first time, then He Who created us the first time out of nothing is certainly able to give us life again after death. It is even more possible for another life to happen, in theory, than it is possible for the first.

The second argument: Is the altering of materials and objects from one state to another, and from one nature to another. The Qur'an gives as an example of that, which all people can test, it is the making of fire from a green tree, for He Who makes something out of its opposite and makes created matter subjugated to Him, all of which is not difficult for Him to do, can give life to bones when they have rotted away and become dust.

The third argument: Is the changing of the creatures from one state to another: Death then life, then death, then life again. From a rigid inanimate seed grows a lush green plant that blossoms and bears fruit. Then from that living plant again we have inanimate seeds that do not grow. From living birds come inanimate eggs and from these eggs again come out animate living birds. Life lies in what we think is lifeless. The

same applies to all humans and animals.

The fourth argument: Is the witnessing of the phenomenon of resurrection in the lives of humans, animals and plants. The normal human body consists of 260,000,000,000,000,000 cells that change every second, and this number decreases rapidly, but this decrease is made up by food. The human body then alters itself, by itself, in a continuous manner, just like a flowing river, and so our body is subjected to the continuing process of change, so that there comes a time when none of the old cells exist in the body. This process is repeated in youth and childhood quickly, while it continues slowly in old age. This change occurs on average once every ten years.

From this we conclude that the actual physical body changes continuously, but the human being inside does not change: His knowledge, habits, memory, aspirations, and thoughts, all remain as they were. If the human perishes when the human body perishes, then it is necessary that he is at least affected by the death of cells and its full change. This confirms that human life is something other than the body, and it remains despite the change of the body and the continuous change of its cells, but then finally it perishes.

The fifth argument: Is that modern day science indicates that the universe's devices are recording all human actions fully. It is, therefore, one of the most important objectives of the afterlife: Reward or punishment for the good deeds or evil actions which were committed in this world according to what is recorded of the human being's actions, which includes: Intentions, utterances, and actions. Scientific evidence demonstrates that these dimensions do not disappear in vain; but can be called and retrieved after their completion:

For intentions or ideas that come to the mind and then we forget... we see them during sleep or we talk about them in conditions of hysteria or insanity, without realizing it. This undoubtedly proves that the mind or the memory are not just the things that we feel and sense, but that there are other parts of the memory that we do not feel, and these have an independent existence, and science has proved that we are not able to erase them.

As for utterances, modern science proves that the voices that we hear are waves in the air, and it has been definitely proven that these waves remain in the air after the first time they have occurred, and can be heard again even after the passage of centuries, though scientists have not been able to apply that in practice yet. Still, this proves that everything spoken by man is recorded.

Lastly, there is the issue of actions that amazingly proves the possibility of an afterlife. Modern science proves that all our movements and our actions, in light or darkness, exist in space in the form of images, and that it is possible at any moment to compile these images. For all objects, animate or inanimate, permanently emit heat, which in turn reflects the forms and dimensions of these objects. A very accurate machine has been invented to capture the heat waves that are projected from any object, but these machines cannot capture thermal waves except for a few hours after the occurrence of the event.

Michael: If we accept the inevitability of the occurrence of the Last Day, and we know its place in Islam, what are the most important features of this doctrine in Islam?

Yousef: The details of this doctrine in Islam are very different from what is mentioned in most other religions, but generally this doctrine can be summed up in the following:

That Allah will obliterate this world and all the creatures that exist, on a day known as the Day of Resurrection.

Then He - the Almighty and Exalted, will give them back their souls and will gather them before Him. This is what is known as Resurrection.

After that all that these people have done, good or evil, nothing more nothing less, will be presented in front of a Divine Court.

Then Allah Almighty will weigh every single person's good and evil actions. If the good deeds outweigh that of the evil, Allah will forgive him, but if the scale of the bad actions outweighs that of the good, then that person will be punished, if Allah wills.

Those who are forgiven will enter Paradise, and those who are punished will enter Hellfire.

Rajiv: Indeed, it is a gravely serious matter.

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Islam and Terrorism

Islam and Terrorism

Michael, Yousef and Rajiv started their usual conversation in the discussion room. Michael began to speak after greeting his two friends:

Michael: I think that what Yousef said in the previous meetings is contrary to what is known about his religion, and needs to be scrutinized. It would appear that only the bright areas of Islam have been highlighted, and the dark ones overlooked. We can see with our own eyes that the terrorism which is rife is Islamically motivated

Rajiv: I agree with you partially, yet I think that terrorism is assumed to be a behavior, not linked to any religion or nationality, and this is what I've suffered from in India, where groups take it in turns to afflict violence on each other for several different reasons. On what then should these observations built, Mr. Michael, so that we might discuss them?

Michael: The point that I actually want to put forward is that Islam was spread by the sword, and that is a well-known fact, for I believe that terrorism is inherent in Islam itself. Do you deny that Mr. Yousef?

Yousef: (Offended) Of course I do!!! And facts deny that too.

Michael: Just what facts do you mean?

Yousef: Religious facts, historical fact and facts on the ground...But let me first say that we should free ourselves from the affect that the propaganda and media have had on our minds, which has been strategically placed by those who have ulterior motives.

Rajiv: I think it's okay to say that we live in a free society, and that no pressure is exercised on us, nor are there any forces that dictate the formation of our minds.

Yousef: It is true, to some extent, that there are no pressures and that we are free to choose, but we ultimately choose from what is offered to us, by those who control the media, and from what politicians and those who have other interests make available for us. Statements of politicians and Western thinkers come one after the other about terrorism, linking it to Islam and calling for a crusade in the name of "combating terrorism", and claiming that this campaign aims at protecting the Western civilization, which is characterized by tolerance and openness, as they say.

Michael: I promise you that we'll remain as we were: seeking the truth

from whatever the source may be and whatever the truth itself may actually be.

Yousef: If Islam is an aggressive religion in its nature and was spread by the sword, and Christianity is a religion of tolerance, as the West claims, then, my friend, do you know how many times the word sword is mentioned in the Qur'an, and how many times in the Bible?

Michael: No, I do not know exactly, but I am certain that it's mentioned in the Qur'an more than in the Bible.

Yousef: Prepare yourselves for this!! The Holy Qur'an is comprised of 114 chapters, containing 6236 verses and 77,439 words, yet the word sword or its synonyms aren't mentioned in the Qur'an once, although it has about 60 synonymous in Arabic, while on the other hand it is mentioned more than 200 times in the Bible.

Michael: Wow!!... That is a real surprise. So is this what you meant by religious facts?

Yousef: This is but one fact of the several religious facts that I won't dwell on due to the constraints of time.

Rajiv: Could you please mention what are the most important of these facts?

Yousef: Sure. One of them, which I think you know my friend Rajiv, is that the regions with the highest density of Muslims in the world are in eastern and southern Asia, but no Muslim army even reached these regions., The same is the case for vast areas of Africa.

Related to this historical fact is what unbiased historians have testified to, which is that they did not find any documented proof to indicate that there had been any cases of coercion to convert people to Islam, in any period of Islamic history.

Michael: But regardless of what you've just mentioned concerning the historians, since I can mention what other historians say that indicate otherwise, what proves this claim?

Yousef: There is more than one proof that I can provide:

Firstly, inhabitants of many of the areas conquered by the Muslims through military expeditions continued to practice their religion under Muslim rule, and there are still some who haven't converted to Islam up until now. This is what happened in countries such as Egypt,

Palestine, Lebanon, Greece and India. This is in contrast with another entirely different picture of what took place when the Christian military dominated Andalusia, Jerusalem and the Philippines. There was overall extermination and coercion to convert into Christianity, as well as forced displacement against all those who didn't believe in Christianity.

Secondly, when the Islamic military control was lifted from the countries that were conquered, and so there was no form of pressure from the Muslims, we didn't see the people of the country giving up Islam. In fact, we saw Muslims of the former Soviet Union secretly practicing their religion under the yoke of Communistic oppression, impatiently waiting for it to demise in order to return, in full swing, to practicing their religion.

Thirdly, history tells us stories of groups, such as the Tatars and the Turks who invaded Muslim lands, who defeated Muslim military strength and occupied large parts of the land, but then converted to Islam as a result of coexisting with Muslims.

Michael: I will acknowledge for the sake of argument that Islam didn't spread by the sword, but history put aside, let's look at the reality now; don't you agree with me about what I said earlier, that the terrorism that has hit the world today is Islamically motivated ?!

Yousef: No! Let's first define terrorism, and then have a look at the map of terrorism around the world to see who really forms it.

Rajiv: Neither world nations nor international organizations have reached an agreement on the definition of terrorism, but we can agree that it is to "terrorize those living in peace, in any way, to influence their will or for the aggressor to achieve political or economic gains."

Yousef: Of course, this disagreement is created by some countries so that the definition of terrorism remains flexible, so it can be easily manipulated. But I'd like to add to your definition: "whether this aggressor is an individual, a group or a state."

Michael: I do not mind this addition. Accordingly, if we review the global events, we find the bombing of the twin towers of the World Trade in New York in 2001, and the subsequent Madrid train bombings, then the Bali Resorts bombings in Indonesia against Western tourists, as well as operations carried out by Palestinians against Jews. All are terrorist operations carried out by Muslims.

Yousef: (Troubled) Hey, hey, my friend, operations that are carried out by the Palestinians are resistance operations against an occupier who has a black history of terrorism. How can we overlook the occupation of an entire land in which people are living and being expelled from, in addition to being intimidated in various ways? Consider the following:

The massacre of the town of Sheikh, on 31/12/1947 where 600 innocent civilians were killed inside their homes.

The massacre of the Village of Deir Yassin on 10/04/1948 where more than half the population of the village were slaughtered.

And Lod on 11/07/1948 where 426 civilians who had gathered in the mosque of the village were killed. It was stormed by Jews who murdered all those inside.

The massacre of Kafr Qasim in 10/1965 where 94 civilians consisting of women and children were killed.

The massacre of Sabra and Shatila on 18/9/1982 carried out in Lebanon by that war criminal Sharon in collusion with the Christian Phalanges forces in Lebanon. The massacre lasted for 72 hours and 3,500 Palestinians and Lebanese, mostly women and children and elderly men, were slaughtered, for no crime except that they had an Islamic identity.

The massacre of the Ibrahimi Mosque, on 25/4/1994, carried out by an IDF soldier in cooperation with other elements of the army and the settlers. In that massacre, 29 worshipers were killed inside the mosque and 50 outside it, and more than 350 worshipers were wounded.

To make your view more comprehensive, I'll also add two further incidents: The explosion in the federal building in Oklahoma in 1995, which killed 168 people and injured 500 others, and the twin massacre of Oslo and the Otoya island in 7/2011, where more than 92 were killed and 90 wounded, both of which bore the signature of Christian extremism and racism par excellence.

Moreover, if this discussion we're having is in the context of the relationship of terrorism with a certain religion or civilization, we simply cannot overlook the fact that during the modern era:

No Muslim country has invaded a Western country, while on the other hand history testifies that the old and the new world have always been the target of invasion for the West.

And that Red Indians were subjected to genocide at the hands of those hoisting the flag of Western civilization. The Red Indian population in the New World shrank from 10 million, to 200 thousand, as well as the fact that their continent was looted.

And the West brought to the world the scourge of two major wars, which were described as World Wars, while in fact they were, especially the first, European Wars. In the first of these wars some 20 million people were killed, and there was almost the same number wounded and disabled. In the second, about 55 million were killed, while 53 million were wounded and 3 million went missing. Most of these victims were from the colonies and were civilians, as it was common in the ethics of these belligerents to target civilians to break the will of the enemy.

Though we agree on the principle of criminalizing any assault on the innocent, yet we can't overlook the motives of those who carried out these incidents that you've just mentioned. They claimed that these incidents were carried out to deter the United States and the West from continuing their aggression and terrorism against Muslims, especially in relation to the siege of Iraq at that time, and the support for the Zionist crimes in Palestine.

Rajiv: So, the bottom line is that we can conclude that terrorism does not belong to any religion or culture.

Yousef: Yes, I may agree with you that it does not belong to any religion, but I think that we must consider the springboards of Western civilization, which are built on the principle of conflict and the sanctification of force, and its relationship to its aggressive practices. The modern Western civilization deeply derives its roots and inspires its ideology from the heritage of two civilizations; the Greek and the Roman. Ideas common in these civilizations, such as the superiority complex, the glorification of power, and the inevitability of struggle... such ideas were inherited by the modern and contemporary Western civilization, and the teachings of Christianity couldn't prevent them from being applied as terrible practices, tragedies, and terrorist operations that swept through Europe itself and the world.

Michael: It appears that we have run out of time, so let's halt here. See you both in our next dialogue.

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This Religion will Play a Major Role in the Future

This Religion will Play a Major Role in the Future

Rajiv was unusually late for his meeting with his two friends, and as soon as he finally appeared on the computer screen's chat program, his friend Michael said to him:

Michael: Hello Rajiv! Nice to see you could finally join us! We have always known you to be punctual. We hope that this delay was not due to something being wrong?

Rajiv: Sorry my friends, I must apologize indeed, and thankfully, there is nothing wrong. I was just busy completing some research that I wanted to present to you both in our meeting today.

Michael: Excellent, then it will be a rich dialogue. So what is this research of yours about then?

Rajiv: In fact, the information that we've exchanged in our conversations about Islam has really aroused my interest and I wanted to look into the spread or decline of this religion around the world.

Michael: The same issue caused me to carry out research too, but in relation to other respects. I expanded the research to include aspects that we touched on in greater depth, and from its original sources... But what did you find in your research? Mr. Yousef!! Are you with us??!

Yousef: Yes, Yes... I am following you.

Rajiv: I have found that all sources and information gathered indicate a rise in the spread of Islam throughout the world. My research reveals that there are more than 4200 creeds and religions around the globe! Statistics indicate that Islam is the fastest growing religion among all the beliefs around the globe, and that today it is spreading in all the continents at a remarkable speed! If we consider the rate of the increase of Muslims and we compare it to the rate of the increase of followers of Christianity for example, we find that a U.N. statistical study states that the annual rate of increase of Muslims in the world is (6.4%), while it is not more than (1%) for Christians.

In my research I have focused on Europe, and I found for example that Islam has become the second largest religion in Spain, France and Britain.

The numbers of Muslims in Germany are growing rapidly too, according to "Die Welt" daily German newspaper.

A study prepared by the French Ministry of Interior confirms that more than 3600 people convert to Islam annually. It also states that there are approximately 2300 mosques and 7 Million Muslims in France. In fact, there are expectations that Muslims will represent a quarter of France's population by the year 2025, while those expectations indicate that Muslims will represent 20% of Europe's population by 2050. Furthermore, there are other statistics that suggest that in 2040, Muslims will form the majority of Europe's population.

Figures also tell us that one third of the Dutch population will be Muslims after 10 years. One study confirms that Islam is spreading astonishingly among the Swedes, as official numbers reveal that the amount of Muslims is on the rise and is estimated to be more than 120,000.

Moreover, expansion in the building of mosques is an indication of the spread of Muslims, especially those who are strong adherents to that religion. Statistics speak of the presence of more than 25,000 mosques in Europe, with a high attendance number.

In contrast to this, studies also confirm the low attendance of Christians in churches. And a study conducted by the "Bank of Dresden" expected a decline in the number of churches in Germany in the coming years. It is predicted that religious masses will completely stop in 96 of the total 350 churches in the "Essen Parish" alone, and the church buildings will be made available for other purposes as a result of the decline in the number of those attending churches and the low returns of church tax.

Perhaps what clearly shows the extreme decline in the attendance of Christians to their churches is that one of the churches in a European country actually held a competition, where one of the prizes was a car, in order to attract people to prayers and sermons!!

Michael: Perhaps that may explain why we see this alarming amount of right-wing parties and some fanatics in Europe harassing and ridiculing Islam and its teachings, as well as attacking its adherents or its symbols, and that's not all, they also demand the expulsion of Muslims from all of Europe. However, I wonder what the reasons are for this great expansion... We haven't heard your opinion yet, Mr. Yousef. You're unusually silent.

Yousef: Of course I am happy with what I hear! I therefore prefer to be silent to enjoy it more! Nevertheless, in my opinion there are reasons inherent in Islam, as well as reasons inherent in the Western society, and

also there are reasons on the ground that form factors which combine together to increase the spread of Islam. However, I must point out that this isn't a strange thing for such an ancient religion as Islam, which is deeply rooted in history since the beginning of creation, from the time of Adam [peace be upon him], and this historical extension hasn't stopped to the present day.

Michael: But Mr. Yousef, we know that Islam only appeared some 1400 years ago, and that there are other heavenly revealed religions, like Christianity and Judaism. Do you deny that?

Yousef: There is a concept that must be corrected in this regard, which is that the religion of Allah is one, and not several. It is one because it emanates from one source, Who is Allah, Who created everything in the universe. There are, however, some situations which this religion pays attention to that require the presence of some laws which are specific for these situations or nations, and also deviations may occur to this religion as the length of the period from the time the message was first revealed becomes longer. This necessitates the renewal of religion by sending a new messenger that emphasizes the fundamentals of this religion and its foundation. This is what was indicated by the hadeeth of the Prophet of Islam, who said: "Prophets are paternal brothers, their religion is one and their mothers are various," that is, their times and laws are varied and different. The human race reached its age of reason at the time of the Prophet of Islam, and the message of this prophet included the inherent factors that protect the soundness of this religion from being lost, and that regenerate it and return it to its original purity, if that ever becomes necessary. So, this religion won't be interrupted and this historic extension will continue until the end of mankind, as it is the seal of religion, which was favored by the Creator for humans. It is only natural that He chooses that which suits them and that which is in conformity with their natural disposition. It is then normal to find Islam spreading in such a way, if things are left to interact naturally and spontaneously.

Rajiv: This is a new and exciting concept for me. Let's then go back Mr. Yousef to what you were about to mention about the reasons for the spread of Islam.

Yousef: Well, as for the reasons inherent in Islam, they can be summarized in that its properties qualify it for this spread, since:

Islam is a simple religion in its structure, deep in its meaning, clear in its concepts, comprehensive in its approach and uncomplicated in its teachings. It doesn't need a high mental ability or special intellectual faculties, and it doesn't contain secrets, talismans, complexities or ambiguities.

Islam is a human religion that addresses human nature, deals with man's circumstances, satisfies his desires, addresses his problems, and answers his questions, and the truths it contains are consistent and harmonious with the reality of life. It also prohibits all kinds of social injustice and emphasizes complete equality among human beings in terms of their origins, regardless of their different colors, their languages, their races or their social levels.

Islam is a realistic religion that doesn't rise above the reality of human beings, nor does it melt in that reality, or decay and become corrupt. Part of this realistic attitude is that it is a religion that combines the worldly life and the hereafter, and doesn't create a conflict between them.

Islam is a religion that respects the human mind and respects human thought, and uses arguments of reason and logical methods first and foremost to lead to helpful understandings, discussion and debate.

Islam is a religion that does not fight science and progress, but rather it encourages them. Established scientific facts that have been reached by science in the modern era agree with the interpretation of Qur'anic texts which were revealed about these fields fourteen centuries ago.

Islam is a religion that keeps pace with progress. It has proven its ability to deal with all the new social situations and changes that happen in life as a result of the change of time and place.

Islam is a religion that achieves real freedom for humans, a freedom which cannot be achieved in its most sublime sense unless humans direct their pure worship only to their Lord, Allah, because in this way they are not servants of any person, or any other creature in nature.

Islam is a religion that was and forever will be open to other cultures.

Michael: And I'll tell you the true condition inherent in Western society, a condition that has left its imprint on the society:

Our Western society lives in a real intellectual tragedy, especially since the beginning of the last century, and even before that. This crisis has led to multiple conflicts which are experienced by our

Western society, particularly between the church and science, and then among the different philosophical schools of thought, and also among the different branches of society. This resulted in the appearance of a wide array of different value systems, and a sense of bewilderment and loss of identity.

Then came the emptiness and the spiritual vacuum which eats away at the Western human entity…An emptiness in which the spirit of man chokes, in which he is considered to be of no value, and his characteristics become degraded, but at the same time material possessions pile up and their values rise, surpassing every value given to the human being until man becomes like a machine, or just one cog in a huge machine!

Another important factor is the uncertainty experienced by many Westerners about their religion and what they see as a contradiction, and a conflict and defect in their creed, despite the apparent fanaticism many of them show in relation to their religions. In addition to that there is what the church describes as the way of purity and salvation which is represented in monasticism. It is seen by most of us as being against human nature and being in conflict with it in many aspects of life.

Furthermore, we cannot ignore the decline of morals and the disintegration of the family and the community which the general conditions of the Western society have come to.

Yousef: If we want to speak about the factors on the ground, we see that campaigns smearing Islam and persecuting its followers may result in the reverse effects happening, which are represented in a reaction to want to get more acquainted with this religion.

There are also the efforts of Muslims who call others to the religion of Allah in spreading Islam. This includes debates held between Islamic scholars and those of other religions. These increase the chances of a Western audience to learn about Islam and what it really is.

We also shouldn't forget the impact of the presence of Muslim minorities in the West, where there is an opportunity for Westerners to become closely acquainted with the Muslims, paving the way for Islamic concepts to become known, and for them to actually see the Islamic pattern of life on the ground.

All that makes me have a bright and optimistic view that confirms that the future is for this religion.

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A Novel

A Novel about Happiness

Mixed up and confusing questions and a philosophy of life,
lusts and desires, aspirations and pleasures, suspicions and objections, contradictions and groans fill George's life and his journey that rotated around the philosophies of life and the meaning of existence in charming London, India the land of wonders, Cairo with its Nile and Pyramids, Jerusalem with its sacredness and religions, and Rome the city of churches....This is a novel full of events in which philosophy, religion and people's lives and their contradictions mix and in which suffering mixes with happiness, skepticism with certainty, pleasure with misery, loyalty with disloyalty, pleasures of the flesh with those of the soul, the speech of the soul with that of the tongue, and superstition and charlatanry grapple with truth and honesty...

An interpretation of the vision of life and its meaning, and in the philosophy of existence and religion through events and philosophies and subsequent, successive and fast ideas and information which look into history and reality and their impact on our lives, and wander with modern science through a scientific philosophical vision.... Will the contradictions of life disappear?! Will George find answers to his questions?! Can it be that a soul is happy with its body?! Is it possible that George will find the road to happiness ...?!

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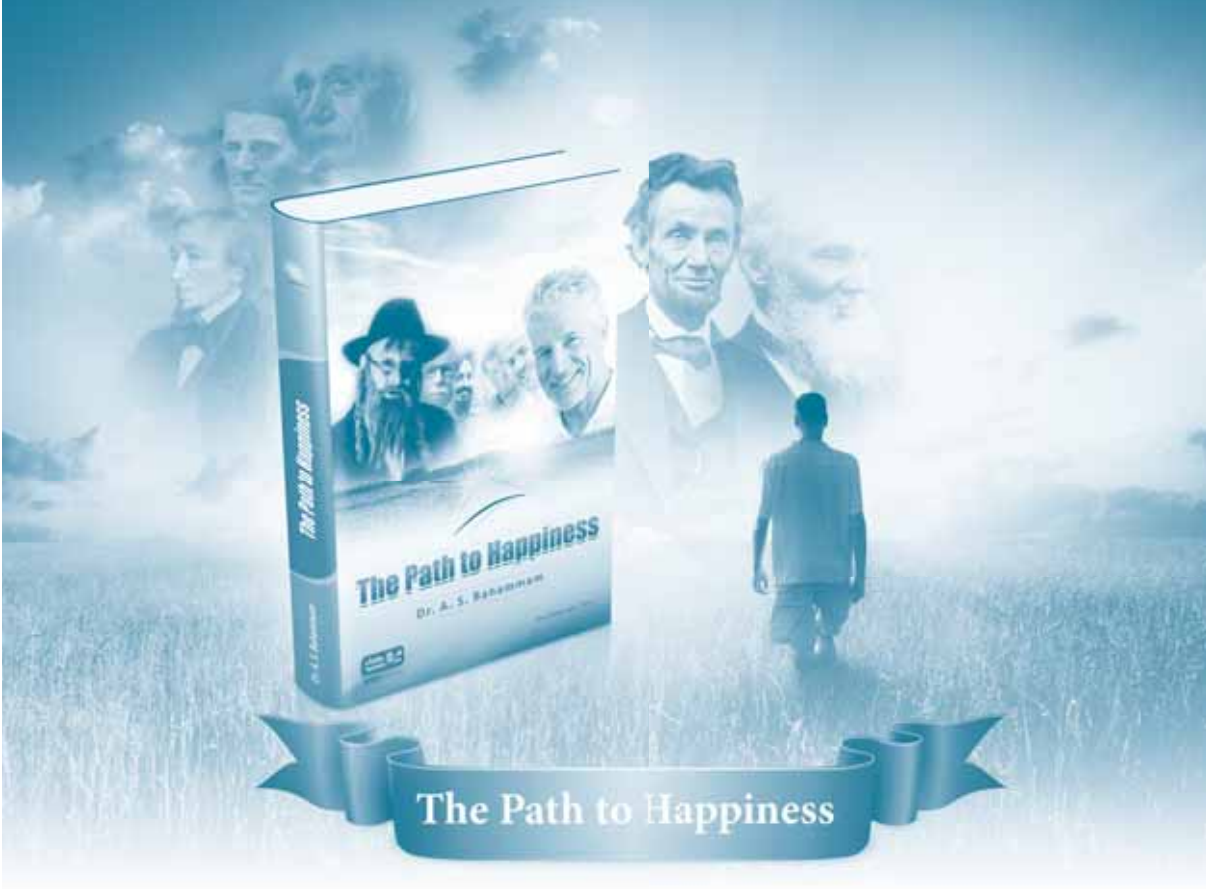

The Path to Happiness

We wish to take you back to the fundamentals, to delve with you into mental reasoning, guided by sayings of philosophers and thinkers, passing on our way through experiences of leaders, wise men and celebrities on a journey through which we search for happiness and the road leading to it.

This is an intellectual and civilized journey with happiness, its road and how to reach it. A journey that delves into the depths of the self from the inside, and also probes history and the past, and looks forward to the future, in the midst of a variety and abundance of approaches that all claim that they own the road to happiness... We attempt to gather and heal the ruffles of the soul and to care for the individual, as well as to keep up with the aspirations of communities, nations and peoples to become acquainted with the road to happiness...

Accompany us to see the appropriate criteria for choosing the road and knowing, it as well as testing and evaluating it...

A journey to get to know the road to happiness... The road of ethics, knowledge and civilization, the road of compassion and dignity...

Do you know this way ..?! Do you want to know it ..?!

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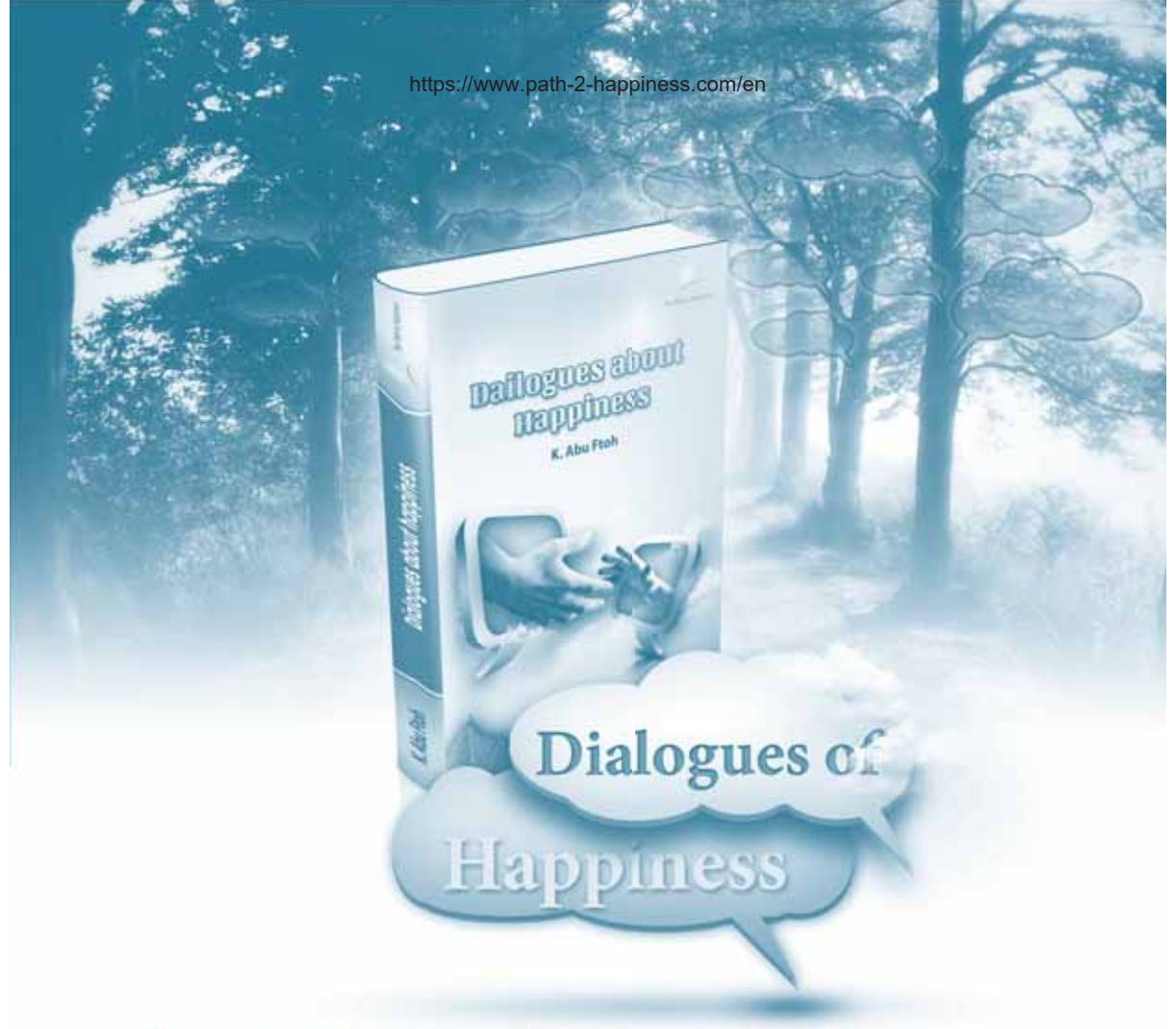

Who among us is searching for happiness?! There is no doubt that everyone is gasping in pursuit of happiness, but how many of us succeed in achieving it? How many of us know how to reach it?

There is no doubt that there are many causes of happiness, but in my opinion the most important of these causes is when man achieves self-realization, which is something that will not happen except when he first achieves his humanity, which is what separates him from animals and other objects.

Thinking about the big questions about the universe and human life, and being guided to their right and reassuring answers leads man to tranquility and serenity, and also to satisfaction and happiness.

These dialogues are a contribution leading to putting our feet on the road to happiness, by dispelling myths and establishing the truth, and reaching answers to questions that occupy the minds of many of us. These dialogues raise comprehensive topics related to humanitarian aspects, and are composed in an exciting simple form and a style that fits most readers.

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